



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL MEDIA

# GDR Literature in German Curricula and Textbooks

Exploring the Legacy of GDR Authors,  
1985–2015

Elizabeth Priester Steding

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# Palgrave Studies in Educational Media

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There is no education without some form of media. Much contemporary writing on media and education examines best practices or individual learning processes, is fired by techno-optimism or techno-pessimism about young people's use of technology, or focuses exclusively on digital media. Relatively few studies attend – empirically or conceptually – to the embeddedness of educational media in contemporary cultural, social and political processes. The **Palgrave Studies in Educational Media** series aims to explore textbooks and other educational media as sites of cultural contestation and socio-political forces. Drawing on local and global perspectives, and attending to the digital, non-digital and post-digital, the series explores how these media are entangled with broader continuities and changes in today's society, with how media and media practices play a role in shaping identifications, subjectivations, inclusions and exclusions, economies and global political projects. Including single authored and edited volumes, it offers a dedicated space which brings together research from across the academic disciplines. The series provides a valuable and accessible resource for researchers, students, teachers, teacher trainers, textbook authors and educational media designers interested in critical and contextualising approaches to the media used in education.

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ISSN 2662-7361

ISSN 2662-737X (electronic)

Palgrave Studies in Educational Media

ISBN 978-3-031-39050-0

ISBN 978-3-031-39051-7 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39051-7>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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*To my parents, Victor and Faith Priester, who have always supported me in  
my love of all things German.*

## FOREWORD

There is no education without some form of media. The field of educational media is a growing area of interest in education, as educational policy papers on the “digital agenda,” the rapid expansion of media sections in national and international educational research associations, and the range of academic books on media in education show. Educational media are crucial to producing knowledge and shaping educational practices. Conflicts over the contents of textbooks and curricula, widely discussed in the daily news, illustrate how many different stakeholders are invested in sharing their particular understandings of our (shared) past, the current society and potential imagined futures with the younger generation. Policymakers, politicians and activists regard educational media as important tools which not only foster young people’s media skills and world knowledge, but which also shape which ways of living are considered desirable or even legible. Textbooks and other educational media are deeply embedded in the socio-political contexts in which they are developed and used. Given this context, alongside the emerging interest in digital technology in education, the *Palgrave Studies in Educational Media* series takes stock of current research on educational media by focusing on three issues:

First, today’s vibrant and dynamic research and scholarship on technology stems from a broad range of disciplines, including sociology, history, cultural studies, memory studies, media studies, and education, and also information, computer, and cognitive science. Traditionally, this research has drawn on textbooks and other educational media in order to engage with specific disciplinary questions, such as device-specific reading speed



or social inclusion/exclusion. Studies on educational media are only beginning to be consolidated into the kind of inter- or transdisciplinary field which can build and develop on insights generated and exchanged across disciplinary boundaries.

Second, the majority of work in this field is focused on best practices, individual learning processes, or concerns over the risks involved when young people use technology. There are still relatively few studies which attend—empirically or conceptually—to the embeddedness of educational media in contemporary cultural, social, and political processes, and to the historicity of the media used in education. If we see educational media as a highly contested and thus crucially important cultural site, then we need more studies which consider media in their contexts, and which take a carefully critical or generative approach to societal concerns.

Third, current work emerging in this field has turned its attention to computers and other digital technologies. Yet looking at today's educational practices, it is clear that (1) they are by no means predominantly digital, and simultaneously (2) 'post-digital' practices abound in which the digital is no longer seen as new or innovative, but is integrated with other materials in daily teaching and learning. The potentials and risks of digital education emit a fascination for politicians, journalists, and others concerned with the future of education, and are undoubtedly important to consider. Empirical observations of education around the globe, however, demonstrate the reach and visibility of a broad range of media (textbooks, blackboards, LEGO™, etc.), as well as the post-digital blending of digital and non-digital media in contemporary educational settings.

*Palgrave Studies in Educational Media* aims to address these three issues in an integrated manner. The series offers a dedicated space which brings together research from across the academic disciplines, encouraging dialogue within the emerging space of educational media studies. It showcases both empirical and theoretical work on educational media which understands these media as a site of cultural contestation and socio-political force. The focus lies primarily on schools, across the school subjects. The series is interested in both local and global perspectives, in order to explore how educational media are entangled with broader debates about continuity and change in today's society, about classroom practices, inclusions and exclusions, identifications, subjectivations, economies and global political projects.

What is included in educational media, and how, allows us valuable insight into the (desired) legacy of past events and how they "should" be

remembered. This interest remains a cornerstone of educational media research and renders this volume by Elizabeth Priester Steding, *GDR Literature in German Curricula and Textbooks: Exploring the Legacy of GDR Authors, 1985–2015*, so pertinent to our series. While all textbooks—not least history books—are subject to the demands of limited space and thus a ruthless process of content selection, the role played by literary canon in culture and society long before a textbook is even thought of renders the procedure for literature textbooks even more complex. While in many cases the result may be a “canon of the canon,” as it were, the texts chosen for study in class may step beyond that canon, addressing or even counteracting its exclusions or limitations. Above all, the choices made in this regard by textbook authors and publishers over the years and decades preceding, during, and following the collapse of the Soviet Union unveil important insight, as Steding aptly puts it in her introduction, “about the society producing [the textbook], and the ways in which ideology is addressed and disseminated in a democratic, pluralistic society.” Above all, that literature must always be read, taught, learned, and analyzed within its broader historical context, and the depiction of these contexts—in the case of the GDR, one clearly remembered in diverse ways by many people still alive and with children in school today—is equally the task of the textbook.

Brunswick, Germany  
May 2023

Eckhardt Fuchs  
Felicitas Macgilchrist

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book began nearly 15 years ago at a German Studies Association conference. During a presentation about GDR history in textbooks, I found myself wondering whether anybody had studied the GDR in *literature* textbooks. The rest, as they say, is (literary) history.

Archives and libraries have played an important role in the creation of this book. My thanks go out to the Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig, especially to Wendy Anne Kopisch and Felicitas Macgilchrist, for their support of this project. I also want to thank the staff at the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek in Leipzig and the interlibrary loan experts at Preus Library on the campus of Luther College.

My journey has also been made possible by generous support from the Fulbright Scholar Program, my Fulbright host Professor Cornelia Blasberg of the University of Münster (now retired), and my home institution, Luther College, specifically the Ruth Caldwell Endowed Faculty Fellowship.

A special note of thanks goes out to the members of the G10 writing group, Nancy Gates Madsen and Victoria Christman. Their support, creativity, and expertise have been crucial in making this book a reality.

Thanks most of all to my husband, Sören, who believed in this book even before I did. You are my sounding board, my travel buddy, my better half.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Introduction

*The GDR was a very long and very interesting footnote of history. And there are history books in which one (in some circumstances) finds the most important things in the footnotes.*<sup>1</sup>

—Stefan Heym

The above quotation, one of the most famous about the legacy of the GDR, comes from a 1993 interview with East German author Stefan Heym. While the phrase “footnote of history” has become shorthand for the GDR, often used to belittle or to downplay the former socialist country, the quotation in its entirety affirms that much can be learned from studying this “footnote.” That it was uttered by a literary author serves as a reminder that our study of the GDR should not be limited to politics and history, as is often the case, but should include the creative and cultural achievements of its citizens—the footnotes of the footnote, one could say.

As a scholar and teacher who has been fascinated by the GDR for decades, I agree with Heym’s claim that much can be learned by examining this nation and its post-1990 legacy. In the decades since

<sup>1</sup>Shortened versions of this quotation appear in several sources. This translation is based on Mommert (1993). All translations from the German throughout this book are by the author.

reunification, coming to terms with the GDR has become Germany's newest form of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*.<sup>2</sup> From the early waves of *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the GDR) to debates over *Stasi* files, the GDR has remained an object of public and scholarly interest. The GDR is definitely being remembered, but how is this legacy being produced and portrayed? For whom and by whom? Most importantly, what does this portrayal reveal about the society producing it, and the ways in which ideology is addressed and disseminated in a democratic, pluralistic society?

While not specifically referring to textbooks, Heym's statement does allude to the power of (history) books and specifically their authors, who decide what information is included in the body of a text and what is relegated to the footnotes, thus shaping and defining the portrayal of any topic. My research picks up where Heym's ideas leave off, and approaches this footnote of history in a very specific way: by examining the legacy and portrayal of GDR literature in East and West German literature textbooks and curricula for the upper grades (*Oberstufe*) of the college-preparatory *Erweiterte Oberschule* and *Gymnasium* from 1985 to 2015.<sup>3</sup> Literature textbooks represent a nexus of literature, history, and ideology, and they reveal as well as shape the larger societal discourses of their time. By examining literature textbooks, we are reminded that literature is never "just" literature, divorced from broader historical context, and that the choice of what to include in literature textbooks—and how to include it—reveals underlying tensions between a focus on literary text and historical context. This is especially clear in the case of GDR literature, whose depiction in textbooks reflects diverging and developing attitudes toward the GDR itself.

<sup>2</sup>The term *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* is gradually replacing *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Both terms are often translated as "coming to terms with the past," but *Bewältigung* suggests a finality to the process while *Aufarbeitung* implies a more open-ended reappraisal of the past. For essays specifically relating to *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* of the GDR past in German society and schools, see Handro and Schaarschmidt (2011).

<sup>3</sup>*Erweiterte Oberschulen* (EOS) existed in the GDR until 1990. After reunification, states in the former GDR adopted the West German school form *Gymnasium*. More detailed information can be found in Chap. 2. For ease of reading, I often simply use the term *Oberstufe* or *Gymnasium*.

## THE POWER OF TEXTBOOKS (AND TEXTBOOK RESEARCH)

Textbooks are imbued with a great deal of power. Described by scholars as “official knowledge,” “relevant knowledge,” and a “sanctioned version of human knowledge and culture,” textbooks distill, package, and disseminate the information that culturally and politically powerful groups deem valuable (Apple 1993a; Lässig 2010; Castell 1990, 78). Textbooks and curricula are simultaneously “documents of social consensus” and part of a “selective tradition,” including and excluding specific content and viewpoints (Mätzing quoted in Wüst 2009; Apple 1993b, 222). This complicated role of textbooks is magnified by the inherently reductionist nature of textbooks as a genre. Textbook authors must select, simplify, and summarize content. These choices are not necessarily intentionally driven by ideology, but the final product—the textbook—does reflect (and shape) the “hegemonic discourses” of its time (Christophe 2020). Therefore, regardless of the subject area, textbooks and curricula are inherently ideological.

While textbook research has long acknowledged the ideological power of all textbooks and curricula, the field understandably concentrates on history, social studies/civics, politics, and even geography, as they are seen to be most clearly prone to, and reflective of, ideological influence (Foster and Crawford 2006; Pingel 2010).<sup>4</sup> History textbooks in particular mirror the national narratives that countries create; analysis of these documents can reveal much about what those in power view as relevant for future generations to learn, to internalize, and to espouse. While the ideological nature of East German history and civics (*Staatsbürgerkunde*) textbooks—with their clear lens of Marxism–Leninism—seems blatant, one must concede that West German textbooks are also shaped by the ideological views specific to the time and place of their publication.

<sup>4</sup>Pingel provides a helpful overview of the history of textbook revision projects by the League of Nations and UNESCO. He points out that “international textbook analysis, with the aim of promoting international understanding, deals mainly with history, geography and civics schoolbooks” (8).

Additionally, the library collection of The Leibniz Institute for Educational Media: Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig, Germany includes “textbooks and curricula for history, geography, ethics and religion, as well as reading primers in the German language and from around the world” (Leibniz Institute). While GEI continues to accept literature textbooks from publishers, the library no longer actively collects literature textbooks for the upper grades.

Textbook research specifically about the GDR follows the larger trends of the field and generally falls into two broad categories: studies with a pre-1990 focus, and those with a post-1990 focus. Research in the first category examines GDR textbooks (sometimes in comparison to FRG textbooks), and research with a post-1990 emphasis analyzes the portrayal of the GDR in the textbooks of a reunified Germany.<sup>5</sup> While there was West German textbook research about the GDR before 1990 (such as Seibert 1970; Aubel 1983), the opening of East German archives and the new freedoms for East German scholars after reunification, along with increased public attention, has led to a noticeable rise in monographs examining GDR textbooks. Some scholarship addresses ideological aspects of textbooks from across the curriculum (Rodden 2006; Knopke 2011), while other analyses explore aspects of individual school subjects, such as the concept of childhood in early readers (*Fibeln*) (Stürmer 2014), English instruction and textbooks (Wagner 2016), or the image of the family in readers (Rothmund 1991). The overtly ideological subjects of geography (Budke 2010), civics (*Staatsbürgerkunde*) (Grammes, Schluß, & Vogler 2006), and history (Mätzing 1999; Schröter 2002; Bröning 2003) make up the bulk of the research. There is a lack of research specifically on upper-grade literature textbooks, although readers interested in learning more about literature instruction in (and about) the GDR and FRG can find many helpful resources in the series *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Deutschunterrichts*.

In somewhat of a contrast to studies of GDR textbooks, research on the portrayal of the GDR in post-1990 textbooks reveals a clear and consistent concentration on history. In many ways, this is to be expected—the GDR *is* history, after all. Book-length research runs the gamut from broad, objective analyses (Buchstab 1999; Klausmeier 2020; Müller-Zetzsche 2020) to works bemoaning the lack of knowledge today's students have about the GDR (Arnswald, Bongertmann, & Mählert 2006; Deutz-Schroeder and Schroeder 2008, 2009). History textbook studies uncover important findings about what was or is considered relevant knowledge in and about the GDR.

However, while history textbooks can reveal much about a nation's social consensus and controversies, they cannot tell the entire story. Literature textbooks can help to fill this gap. History textbooks

<sup>5</sup>Throughout the book, I use the term FRG to refer specifically to 1949–1990 West Germany.

deliberately and (self-)consciously create a national narrative, so textbook authors are keenly aware of how they portray the past.<sup>6</sup> Literature textbooks create a similar narrative, but they reveal attitudes about the past in a more veiled manner: through the privileging of particular authors and literary forms, the comprehension questions posed to students, and the informational texts presented alongside literary texts. Issues of ideology, power, and memory may not seem obvious at first glance, but that is exactly what makes literature textbooks powerful—a close analysis often reveals unacknowledged or undisclosed viewpoints about the cultural value of certain texts, authors, and regimes for those determining the “official knowledge” of their time. This is especially true in literature textbooks for the upper grades, which are often tasked with providing an overview of several hundred years of literary history. Literature textbooks help establish and perpetuate a literary canon, suggesting which texts and authors should remain part of the cultural heritage and discourse, and shaping how literature is portrayed.

It is worth bearing in mind the unique role which literature itself plays. Literature is often described as being both timely and timeless—distinctly framing the time and place in which it was written while also addressing enduring themes. Literary texts help us to ask larger questions about ourselves and our world, to imagine alternate ways of being, to celebrate aesthetic creativity. With all due respect to historical documents such as the *Grundgesetz* (German Basic Law) or the *Westfälischer Frieden* (Peace of Westphalia), such texts do not fill the same role as literature. But what about literature textbooks? As Pingel notes, literature textbooks “contribute considerably to what students know and how they think about others—not least because poetry, for example, makes no claim to being ‘objective’” (2010, 8). While I agree with Pingel, we will observe that literature textbooks for the upper grades struggle at times with the “subjective” elements of literature and the more “objective” elements of (literary) history, especially in their portrayal of GDR literature.

While textbook research has clearly recognized history textbooks as a rich source for discovering attitudes in and about the GDR, literature textbooks largely have been overlooked. My analysis begins to answer some of the many intriguing questions raised by a closer look at these documents of official knowledge: To what extent is GDR literature considered part of

<sup>6</sup>For a helpful overview of textbook research addressing nations and nationhood, see Carrier (2018).

the (school) literary canon? (How) does this change over time? What images are fashioned of the GDR and its creative and cultural achievements? Is the focus more on literary texts or on political context?<sup>7</sup>

### PORTRAYING THE GDR IN TEXTBOOKS

Literature and history textbooks, which include numerous primary texts, present these artifacts through a double frame. The first frame contains the text as part of its time of creation; the second frame is constituted by the historical and cultural context of the textbook's production. In contrast to source materials presented in history textbooks, however, fictional texts are much more difficult to frame: while tied to reality, they also go beyond it; while creations of their time, they often strive to transcend it. Because of this, they are by nature multifunctional, they are sources (in the historical sense) for their period and useful to enlighten us about that specific point in time, and they are art, expressions of human creativity, exploring the human condition across time. This double frame presents unique opportunities and challenges for textbooks that cover literary history.

In history textbooks, the political systems of East and West Germany generally have been depicted in opposition, with each side claiming that its system is superior and using the shortcomings of the other system as proof. Since the collapse of the GDR and the reunification of Germany, the narrative of West Germany's political and ideological superiority to the GDR system has unsurprisingly become the consensus in textbooks. But while a rejection of GDR politics and ideology seems reasonable and logical in history textbooks, it is problematic for GDR texts and authors in literature textbooks. GDR literature, particularly socialist realism, has always been closely associated with politics, whether in support or in protest of Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) policies. In post-1990 textbooks situating the FRG as the victor over the SED system, the creative and cultural achievements of GDR literature risk being instrumentalized as ideological critique, while West German texts are depicted as "literature." When this happens, literary texts by GDR authors are relegated to the status of evidence in the

<sup>7</sup>Academic research, especially in English, is largely silent in this area. Two exceptions are Steding (2014a, 2014b).

assessment of a political system, and the partisan context of their creation receives more attention than their artistic value.

This book addresses these developments, examining the discourses about the recent German past by tracing the portrayal of GDR literature in textbooks and curricula over the final years leading up to German reunification and the first quarter century following it, specifically the inclusion of GDR literature in textbooks and curricula for upper-level secondary students (*gymnasiale Oberstufe*). While I draw on my training as a Germanist, my book is not an analysis of the literary texts themselves; rather, it is a close analysis of textbooks and curricula. My underlying thesis is that the (re)presentation of GDR literature from 1985 to 2015 reveals an essential and unresolved tension between presenting these works as (literary) text or (historical) context, depending on the message that individual curricula and textbooks want to convey (or suppress). In certain settings, GDR literature is essentially made a footnote of GDR history. GDR literature in textbooks continues to reflect shifting views of GDR socialist ideology, regional differences in mindsets, and contention about GDR texts being viewed either primarily as literature or as historical–political documents. Textbooks do not simply reflect societal views, however; they shape them as well. For many students, especially those born after 1990 and therefore having no firsthand knowledge of the GDR, their only significant encounters with GDR literature likely are in textbooks, which lends even more importance to having a clear understanding of what is presented in these documents of supposed social consensus.

### ON THE NATURE OF (RE)PRESENTATION—(LITERARY) TEXT AND (HISTORICAL) CONTEXT

At the heart of the text–context tension is the issue of (re)presentation: What are textbooks presenting to students, and what does this material represent? No single textbook can include everything, so choices must be made about what is “important” or “exemplary.”<sup>8</sup> Individual texts are included not just for their own intrinsic qualities, but because they represent a particular genre or period. Each text therefore functions as a symbol for much more. This then raises the question of what GDR authors such as Bertolt Brecht, Johannes R. Becher, Anna Seghers, Wolf Biermann, and

<sup>8</sup> As will be discussed in Chap. 2, many federal and state documents use the terms “exemplary” or “important” works and authors.

Christa Wolf represent in literature textbooks. The ostensible answer is: GDR literature. The “complete” answer, however, is much more nuanced, and in fact is the basis of this book.

Generally speaking, there are three main ways to organize literature textbooks: chronologically, by genre, or by topic (such as “love” or “science”). Many textbooks, especially newer ones, often combine these approaches, with chapters such as “love poems throughout the ages” or “science in drama.” Because the goals of literature instruction in the *Oberstufe* include an overview of literary history (see Chap. 2 for more detail), most textbooks have at least several chapters dedicated to the major movements and time periods, such as post-1945 or FRG/GDR literature. This means that any individual author or text may appear in various settings, based on epoch, topic, or genre.

One key component, therefore, in answering the question of what GDR texts represent in textbooks is where and how they are included. My argument is that there is a spectrum of presentation which strongly determines what GDR literature represents. When included in chapters about topics or genres, GDR texts nearly exclusively represent that aspect, such as the aforementioned “love poems throughout the ages” or “science in drama.” Attention is clearly centered on the texts themselves, rather than on their historical and political context.<sup>9</sup> This is noticeably different in chapters about FRG/GDR literature, which are the focus of my analysis. Simply being marked as “GDR” politicizes these texts and authors—the lens shifts from literature to GDR (from text to context). This may be fairly subtle, such as reading comprehension questions asking students to research more about the situation in the GDR when a text was written, or it may be very overt, such as textbook-author-produced supplemental texts which critique the cultural politics of the entire GDR.<sup>10</sup> In these settings, texts are not simply representative of literary styles or themes, rather the texts and authors represent and reflect specific attitudes about GDR literature and the GDR itself. These attitudes are most overtly revealed in supplemental texts within FRG/GDR chapters.

<sup>9</sup>This is true for all texts included in topical/genre-specific contexts, not just for GDR literature.

<sup>10</sup>It is worth noting that reading comprehension questions in all books initially engage with the text itself (literary analysis). Questions specifically about the GDR/FRG are usually the last question(s) for any text, and they are by and large evenhanded.



My use of this text–context spectrum as a basis for analysis does come with a few caveats. I am not arguing that literary texts should be presented divorced from their historical context, or that one end of the spectrum is better than the other. Rather, I am critiquing the tendency of some textbooks to use historical context less as a means for situating literary texts within a cultural background than as a vehicle for ideological critique of the GDR state. At the same time, however, I acknowledge that my own writing can also be viewed as ideological critique, occupying the same spectrum which I sometimes criticize in textbooks. In a way, I am operating within the same restraints that textbook authors are. It is not possible to step outside of the text–context spectrum, but it is important to recognize its omnipresence.

The question of text and context is most predominant in textbooks used after 1990, for two reasons which are unrelated but which intensify the trend. The first is related to developments in textbook design and philosophy: the shift from pure anthologies to the inclusion of supplemental extra-literary texts such as author biographies, historical overviews, introductory texts, and to some extent reading comprehension questions. Whereas with traditional anthologies individual readers and/or teachers were responsible for forming opinions about texts and supplying historical context, in newer textbooks, extra-literary texts do much of this work. This does provide students with a more complete understanding of literary history, but it ultimately provides only one version of that narrative. The “objective truth” about GDR literary history is found in the “claim to facticity” of extra-literary texts, giving textbook authors a large measure of ideological power, whether they exercise it knowingly or unknowingly (Castell 1990, 78). Castell actually refers to textbooks as “authorized” rather than “authored,” underscoring their role as supposedly objective, authoritative documents (80).<sup>11</sup> The second development is historical: after the reunification of Germany in 1990, there was a greater perceived need to explain aspects of the GDR to students, many of whom (at least by 2005) had no firsthand knowledge of the time period and therefore were assumed less equipped to understand its literature. These two developments work hand-in-hand to make literature textbooks a rich field for examining attitudes about GDR literature, culture, and politics—and to

<sup>11</sup> Readers interested in an overview of research on textbook authors and authorship can consult Otto (2018).

what extent attitudes about GDR literature and culture have become conflated with attitudes about SED politics.

### METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This study analyzes literature textbooks and curricula for the *Oberstufe*, generally grades 11–12/13 (see Chap. 2) of the college-preparatory *Gymnasium*. Literature instruction in the *Oberstufe* centers around literary history, so the likelihood that GDR (and/or FRG) literature will appear in curricula and textbooks is high. I have selected four federal states for my analysis which are representative of the entire country—two in former West Germany (Bayern and Nordrhein-Westfalen) and two in former East Germany (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen). This group of four federal states also captures different political climates (Bayern and Sachsen tend to be more politically conservative than Nordrhein-Westfalen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) and levels of curricular prescriptivism (Bayern and Sachsen tend to have more prescriptive curricula than do Nordrhein-Westfalen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern). The similarities between Bayern and Sachsen are not surprising, as Bayern served as a “partner state” for Sachsen after reunification, providing advice and sample curricula as Sachsen overhauled its newly non-socialist school system.<sup>12</sup>

As textbooks, and by extension, curricula, inherently are “comparatively static media” (Lässig 2010, 199), and because schools tend to use the same textbooks for several years, it is possible to obtain a clear overview of the inclusion of GDR literature by taking what I refer to as snapshots every ten years. My detailed analysis of state curricula and individual textbooks is therefore based on the years 1985, 1995, 2005, and 2015, and it includes seven or eight textbooks for each of these years. While each federal state generally has 10 to 20 items on its approved annual textbook list for the *Oberstufe*, some of these are short, thematically based readers, and others are literary histories with no primary texts. I selected longer textbooks more likely to include contemporary literature, those approved in multiple states (when possible), and those published by a variety of publishers to form a representative sampling. (See Appendix A for a chronological list of textbooks.) The study does not begin in 1975 for the

<sup>12</sup>For more information, and a list of partnerships, see Pritchard (1999) (38), Rust and Rust (1995) (182). Sachsen also worked with Baden-Württemberg and Hessen, while Mecklenburg-Vorpommern partnered with Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, and Bremen.

simple fact that the inclusion level for GDR (and FRG) literature is so low that few conclusions can be drawn, other than that contemporary literature was not viewed as being part of the school canon. In contrast, 1985 is an important year because inclusion levels are high enough to provide insight into the situation before German reunification, allowing readers to see how GDR authors were presented in the markedly differing GDR and FRG. The year 1995 represents a radical change for the former GDR states Sachsen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, with smaller changes for Bayern and Nordrhein-Westfalen. These small, yet revealing shifts and developments continue in 2005 and 2015.

While I do at times discuss developments and reforms in the educational system of the GDR and FRG, this book is not a comprehensive history of education, curricula, or textbooks.<sup>13</sup> It is likewise not an exhaustive history/historiography of the GDR, although it occasionally does draw on the public and academic discourse about the GDR and its literature at a specific time (for example, the controversy surrounding Christa Wolf's narrative *Was bleibt* in the early 1990s). In a way, textbooks create a historiography of their own—reflecting public discourse in their pages, albeit with some delay. In this context, my book does serve as a historiography of the GDR, one mediated through the pages of the “tendentially conservative media” of curricula and textbooks (Lässig 2010, 209).

At the textbook level, case studies of five GDR authors drive my analysis. To some extent, the individual GDR authors represent larger groups of authors: first-generation GDR socialists (Bertolt Brecht, Johannes R. Becher, Anna Seghers), and authors of the established GDR who grappled with the realities of developed socialism in differing ways (Christa Wolf, Wolf Biermann). These authors, moreover, are individually viewed as important enough to be regularly included in textbooks, which allows for a meaningful analysis of trends and developments. Their moderate to high inclusion rates in textbooks (in comparison to other GDR authors) also suggests that they can be understood as representative authors for specific topics, time periods, and genres.

My methodological approach to the case studies draws upon techniques from literary studies and discourse analysis. I undertake a close textual analysis—not of GDR literary texts themselves, but of the documents (curricula, textbooks) in which these literary texts appear. Particular

<sup>13</sup>For readers interested in learning more about education during this time, see Anweiler (1988); Anweiler et al. (1990) Führ and Furck (1998a, b); Pritchard (1999).

attention is paid to extra-literary texts produced by textbook authors, which profoundly impact the presentation and portrayal of the GDR and its literature. When possible, direct comparisons of multiple “generations” of editions of the same textbook are included to show change over time. Seemingly small differences in wording can very effectively reflect, perhaps even shape, developments in discourse about the GDR. Close textual analysis can reveal cultural consensus and conflict in the portrayal of each of the featured GDR authors.

## OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

At the heart of this book are issues of representation and the focus on literary text or historical context. When included in chapters about GDR literature, GDR authors overtly represent literary developments in the GDR and covertly represent contemporary attitudes of the cultural elite toward the GDR (or the SED regime) itself. These attitudes are codified in state curricula and federal guidelines, which are discussed in Chap. 2. Subsequent chapters are case studies of individual authors or pairs of authors which examine various aspects of the complicated interplay of GDR literature, SED cultural politics, and contemporary ideological grappling with—or critique of—the GDR itself. While the overall inclusion level of GDR literature increases from 1985 to 2015, its representation in chapters specifically about post-1945 literature simultaneously becomes more politicized.

At a most basic level, representation is about being present; once this hurdle is cleared, the question is how material is represented. Chapter 2 thus analyzes the federal- and state-level documents that play a key role in influencing individual textbooks and determining whether GDR literature is included at all. Attention is also paid to inclusion levels of FRG and contemporary literature to determine if GDR literature is singled out for exclusion or inclusion. Federal guidelines for the school-leaving examination (*Abitur*) and state curricula are documents which shape and are shaped by dominant attitudes of the cultural and political elite. Content deemed too important to ignore is therefore required, or at least mentioned, in most curricula, while less-relevant knowledge (to adapt Lässig’s term) is included as optional or omitted completely. It is not a stretch to say that content omitted from the curriculum is at risk of being omitted from textbooks and classroom instruction as well. While GDR literature is included at generally equivalent levels to FRG and contemporary literature, current developments in education (such as the competency-based

approach) have potentially negative effects for the future of GDR literature in curricula and textbooks. A closer analysis of the representation of GDR literature in state curricula reveals two clear topics: inclusion vs. othering, and attention to literary text vs. historical context.

Chapter 3 marks the shift to case studies and concentrates on Bertolt Brecht, the German author who is too big to ignore, and who is thus claimed by both the FRG and GDR as theirs. This claiming, however, is somewhat problematic in the West, due to Brecht's time in the GDR (1949–1956). In marked contrast to the 1980 GDR textbook, *Literatur 11/12*, relatively few of Brecht's post-1949 texts appear in West German textbooks, and extra-literary texts often acknowledge his support of socialism and communism while simultaneously omitting the fact that he actually lived in the GDR. Many West German textbooks celebrate Brecht's early works, but are hesitant to acknowledge the potentially uncomfortable aspects of his life after 1949. Overall, this hesitancy does lessen over time, but it is still evident in some books used in 2015. Even when included in post-unification textbook chapters about GDR literature, Brecht is clearly portrayed in opposition to the SED regime—a committed socialist who stood outside the failings of the SED party system and who can be claimed wholeheartedly by the West.

Chapter 4 examines the portrayals of Anna Seghers and Johannes R. Becher, which reflect attitudes about socialist realism and reveal how an already politicized literary style becomes a vehicle for ideological critique. Socialist realism existed before the GDR, but was coopted by the SED as “the” East German literary style in the early years of the country. Like Brecht, Seghers and Becher were successful socialist authors before and during World War II, but unlike him, they both publicly supported the SED's insistence on adherence to the tenets of socialist realism. With the exception of the GDR textbook, *Literatur 11/12*, textbooks across the board emphasize Seghers' and Becher's pre-1949 works and nearly completely omit works written later. When post-1949 works are mentioned, it is often with comments about their lesser literary value. While many scholars may agree with this assessment, it is rarely explained in textbooks, likely leaving students with little understanding of the role of socialist realism in the GDR or why it is commonly so belittled now.

Wolf Biermann (Chap. 5) represents how the portrayal of GDR literature is often subsumed by politics. Biermann is perhaps the most well-known victim of SED cultural politics; his expatriation in 1976 while on a concert tour in West Germany marked the beginning of a wave of GDR

author defections to the FRG. It is therefore not surprising that some textbooks seem to dwell more on the politics surrounding Biermann than on his texts themselves. This development is particularly clear in textbooks with extensive extra-literary texts, which on the whole tilt more toward an emphasis on GDR politics and ideology critique than on GDR literature. Over time, the emphasis becomes less on texts by Biermann than on extra-literary texts about his protest and expatriation. Literature takes a back seat to history.

In sharp contrast to other authors, the portrayal of Christa Wolf is consistently positive, multifaceted, and concentrated on her literary works. Chapter 6 argues that Wolf is the (West) German darling of GDR literature, and that textbooks go to great lengths to preserve her literary reputation. Celebrated for her challenge of socialist realist rules, Wolf symbolizes for many the beginning of GDR literature worth reading. Her texts are included in thematically-based textbook chapters as well as those covering the literary history of the GDR, thereby positioning her as a German author, not “merely” a GDR author. Wolf’s reputation was very publicly challenged in the *Literaturstreit* (literary controversy) following the 1990 publication of her novella *Was bleibt* (*What remains*), with many (generally West German) literary critics harshly attacking Wolf’s literary, personal, and political choices and making her a symbol of a general reckoning with the GDR past. It is nearly two decades later, however, before the *Literaturstreit* is addressed in textbooks, and textbook authors use a variety of strategies to protect Wolf’s favored status. In a departure from concentrating solely on the GDR, Chap. 6 briefly explores the portrayal of FRG author Günter Grass, whose 2006 memoir *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (*Peeling the Onion*) produced its own societal reckoning. In this context, textbooks treat Wolf and Grass quite similarly, by creating consistently positive depictions of these literary favorites.

Much changed in Germany from 1985 to 2015, and textbooks reflect these changes. While research about social science textbooks plays an important role in understanding the history and legacy of the GDR, a close reading of literature textbooks can provide us with a more complete picture. We can see developments in the school canon, the impact of trends in educational approaches and textbook design, and the complicated role of politics and ideology in the world of literature (textbooks). The tension between a focus on literary text and historical context manifests in multiple and often surprising ways, revealing and shaping contemporary attitudes toward the GDR, its literature, and its politics. It is

important for students to interact with GDR literature—as literature—in the *Oberstufe* to help them develop a richer, more nuanced understanding of the country, its creative achievements, and of themselves. Studying the GDR in history class is important, but literature provides other powerful opportunities for students to develop empathy, creativity, and curiosity. One could go so far as to claim that ignoring the artistic legacy of GDR literature does a disservice to Germany’s future. It is therefore time to lift GDR literature out of the footnotes and place it back into the body of the text.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# What's Behind Textbooks? Federal and State Documents

Textbooks are only one element in a chain of documents which shape education. State curricula, education policy, even federal laws delineate academic and ideological goals. In many respects, textbooks themselves are actually the last element in a trickle-down system of decisions about education. This chapter examines the federal and state documents which ultimately shape individual textbooks; the underlying supposition is that these documents reveal what is important to those making decisions about education, and that these priorities both reflect and shape the discourse of their day. Therefore, analyzing how, or even if, GDR literature is included provides insight into shifts and continuities in attitudes about the legacy of the GDR over time.

This chapter addresses the topic in the following ways: it first briefly outlines the ideological goals for (literature) education in the GDR and (West) Germany, as such goals are the driving force behind subsequent education policies.<sup>1</sup> The chapter then shifts its attention to key federal documents in (West) Germany, the Standardized Examination Requirements for the *Abitur* School-Leaving Exam (*Einheitliche Prüfungsanforderungen in der Abiturprüfung*, referred to as EPA), to

<sup>1</sup>While it is somewhat clunky, I use the term (West) Germany to indicate pre-unification West Germany plus post-unification Germany. I reserve the term FRG for 1949–1990 West Germany, generally as a counterpart to the GDR.

examine pertinent objectives for literary instruction—the central role of literature in cultural memory, a focus on literary history, and a call to include “exemplary” works—to discover how they may (dis)advantage GDR literature.<sup>2</sup> Then state curricula from both East and West come under the lens, initially to discover whether GDR literature is included at all, and then to scrutinize how GDR literature is portrayed in these documents. Here we will see the trickle-down effects of federal documents as each state curriculum seeks to position GDR literature within the larger frame of German literary history emphasized in the EPA. This often results in a clear othering of GDR literature, along with a growing concentration on political context, potentially at the expense of literary texts. It is also at the level of state curricula where differences are most apparent, and where competing simplistic or nuanced narratives and evaluations of the cultural legacy of the GDR are most conspicuous.

#### IDEOLOGICAL GOALS FOR (LITERATURE) EDUCATION IN THE GDR AND (WEST) GERMANY

While most readers likely are aware of the ideological differences between the GDR and the FRG, it is important to bear in mind how they impacted the educational systems in both countries, from their organization to their ultimate goals for students. It is only by examining these differing goals that the curricula and textbooks from both countries, and also from post-unification Germany, can be fully analyzed and understood.

In the GDR, goals for education were determined at a federal level, and are succinctly expressed in the Uniform Socialist Educational System Act of 25 February 1965: “a high level of education of the entire nation, the education and upbringing of well-rounded and harmoniously developed socialist personalities (*sozialistische Persönlichkeiten*)” (Ministerrat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1965, §1.1). The act, which “contains the fundamental decisions from which all further individual policies can be derived,” shaped East German education through 1990 (Ramm 1990, 37). Schools were tasked with educating students not just about socialism, but as “conscious socialist citizens who take an active part in society” (Ministerrat, §13.2). Ideas of socialist citizenship were not

<sup>2</sup>Due to the extremely centralized nature of education in the GDR, there was not an East German equivalent to the EPA.

limited to history or civics (*Staatsbürgerkunde*) classes, but were the ultimate goal of education itself.

This overarching goal of raising good socialists was reflected in the organization of the GDR school system.<sup>3</sup> In the GDR, nearly all children attended a *Polytechnische Oberschule* (POS) from grades one through ten. The vast majority of POS graduates then went directly on to work, further job training, or mandatory military service, with roughly 10 percent of any class attending an *Erweiterte Oberschule* (EOS) for grades 11–12 in preparation for university (Baske 1990, 215).<sup>4</sup> The EOS represented a difficult philosophical dilemma for the SED: publicly dedicated to the socialist tenet of equal opportunity for all, Party leaders likewise recognized that a socialist country needed at least some highly educated scholars, not just well-trained workers. By the 1970s, the EOS symbolized an “acceptance of duality” after the “concept of unity” of the POS (Waterkamp 1985, 360). According to the Admissions Regulations for the EOS, students needed not only good grades but also “political-moral and personal maturity” to be considered for the EOS (Ministerrat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1984, §2.2). Furthermore, they were required to have “proven their solidarity with the German Democratic Republic through their mindset and social activity” (Ibid.). Such expectations were not limited to potential students, however; preference was given to those whose parents were members of the working class and/or who had made “outstanding achievements in the development of socialism” (Ibid., §3.5). Dedication to socialism was not just a one-generation requirement.

The desired outcome of enthusiastic young socialists unsurprisingly carries through all official GDR school documents. The emphasis on socialism found in the 1965 Educational System Act is clearly reflected in the 1979 EOS German curriculum for grades 11 and 12:

Instruction makes its contribution to upbringing (*Erziehung*) in its development of students’ linguistic competence and their sense of responsibility to their native language; its “completion” of the literary education (*Bildung*)

<sup>3</sup>The following obviously is a brief, simplified overview of the GDR education system. Readers interested in learning more can consult Anweiler 1988, Anweiler et al. 1990, Führ and Furck 1998.

<sup>4</sup>Young men generally were required to serve in the National People’s Army (*Nationale Volksarmee*) for 18 months between the ages of 18 and 26.

Baske (1990, 215) includes the following admittance rates to EOS: 1971 11 percent, 1975 8.8 percent, 1980 8.3 percent.

of students;<sup>5</sup> its development of aesthetic interests and needs as they relate to the ideals of the working class; and its formation of communist attitudes and mindsets. (GDR 1979, 7)<sup>6</sup>

While the expected goals of linguistic and literary skill development are expressed, they are predominantly presented as means to an end: the development of good socialist citizens. The use of the word “communist” here is somewhat of an anomaly, but the words “socialist” and “socialism” appear over 60 times in the literature curriculum alone.

At times, this centrality of socialism leads to educational goals that are puzzling to Western readers. For example, the GDR curriculum states that in their required two years of literary instruction at the EOS, “students will become versed in important aesthetic categories, in particular the categories of partisanship, artistic truth and solidarity with the people (*Volksverbundenheit*) of the author and literature” (Ibid., 11). The direct link made here between aesthetics and politics, the concept of partisanship as an “aesthetic category,” reflects the ultimate goals of literary instruction in the GDR: developing socialist citizens.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, this overt melding of literature and politics by the GDR itself is also echoed in post-1990 *Western* German textbooks, many of which draw clear connections between GDR literature and the SED system.

While the ultimate goal of GDR education was to create good socialist citizens, it is important to note the key role that literature played in that process, and in defining a GDR national identity. Classics of German literature as well as contemporary socialist realist works were viewed as significant elements of GDR culture and identity. This is illustrated in the literature curriculum, which devotes extensive coverage to classical literature and its “meaning for socialist national culture” as well as socialist

<sup>5</sup> German has two words that often get translated as “education”: *Bildung* (schooling, education, formation) and *Erziehung* (education, upbringing). Schools in the FRG and GDR are/were charged with both. Rosalind Pritchard’s (1999) free translation of *Erziehung* as “character formation” is also fitting.

<sup>6</sup> For ease of reading, I cite all curricula by state and year.

<sup>7</sup> Those familiar with Cuban history will see similarities here to Castro’s claim that “everything belongs to the revolution.” (Thanks to my colleague Nancy Gates Madsen for pointing out this connection.) For the SED, literature was an important part of creating and sustaining a socialist society.

realist literature's role as a "co-creator of socialist society" (GDR 1979, 35). Head of state Walter Ulbricht frequently used the phrase "socialist national literature" in his speeches to describe a uniquely GDR literature, and the 1959 Bitterfeld Conference guidelines (*Bitterfelder Weg*) urged workers to "Grab a pen, pal! Socialist national literature needs you!"<sup>8</sup> Even the oppression of authors and censoring of texts critical of the SED reflect a recognition of literature's power to shape public discourse and character. While literature contributed to the formation of West German identity and continues to influence German culture today, it occupied a uniquely privileged position in the education system and national consciousness of the GDR.

One other noteworthy trait of the GDR education system is its high degree of centralization. Rather than leave decision-making power to districts, schools, or teachers, the federal government closely controlled the production and distribution of all types of education materials, from the national curriculum to the single approved book for each subject and grade level. Content goals and requirements therefore were consistent throughout the country, and the power to influence education was held by the SED. The objective of educating loyal socialists was too important to be defined by anyone other than the most select group of the cultural and political elite.

The education system in (West) Germany, both before and after reunification, predictably reflects quite different ideological goals. In contrast to the GDR, the school system in (West) Germany institutes tracking at a fairly young age. Rather than providing a uniform educational experience for everyone through grade 10, the school system acknowledges differences in academic ability and promise early on. Children attend elementary school (grades 1–4) together and then are separated into a three-tier system for secondary school: *Hauptschule* (grades 5–9), *Realschule* (grades

<sup>8</sup>"*Greif zur Feder, Kumpel! die sozialistische Nationalliteratur braucht dich!*"—The term *Kumpel* can also refer to a miner. "National literature" is also sometimes replaced with "national culture".

The *Bitterfelder Weg* guidelines were focused on strengthening the connection between literature and the world of work(ers). Authors were embedded in industry, workers formed writing groups, and literary works glorified the socialist worker.

5–10), or *Gymnasium* (grades 5–12/13).<sup>9</sup> Students who successfully complete the *Gymnasium* and the *Abitur* school-leaving exam may then study at university. The upper two to three grades at *Gymnasium* are the *Oberstufe*, and they seek to prepare students for post-secondary education by providing them with a rigorous and well-rounded education that allows some level of academic specialization. All students are required to take German during the *Oberstufe*, and it is part of the *Abitur* as well. While statistics vary over time, anywhere from 10 percent (1960) to 50 percent (2015) of an age group attends *Gymnasium* (Fokken 2017; Wagener 2017). Whereas the GDR appeared almost reluctant to support specialization and differentiation of students, (West) Germany celebrates it.

### *The Role of the (West) German Kultusministerium*

Rather than operate under a centralized education system like in the GDR, each of the federal states of (West) Germany retains cultural sovereignty and thus the ability to design and regulate education largely as it sees fit. However, in a very early move to establish some level of commonality after WWII, in 1948, the education ministers from the three western occupation zones created The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany (*Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, generally called the *Kultusministerkonferenz* or KMK).<sup>10</sup> As there is no federal mandate, any resolutions made by the KMK must first be ratified by individual states. Generally strong state-level support, however, means that the organization has played a significant role in shaping education in (West) Germany, particularly at the *Oberstufe* level.

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of educational reform and upheaval in West Germany, with a redesign of the *Oberstufe* occurring in 1972. Requirements were revised, basic and advanced courses were introduced,

<sup>9</sup>This is a very simplified overview of the (West) German education system. Particularly in the past few years, there have been modifications to the three-tier system. Many districts are combining their *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* into one shared school, while the *Gymnasium* is often retained separately. Other districts offer comprehensive schools (*integrierte Gesamtschulen*) for students of all ability levels. Widespread school reform initiatives have shortened *Gymnasium* from nine years (through grade 13) to eight (through grade 12), making it similar to the GDR, where the *EOS* was always through grade 12. This reform has recently been questioned and overturned in some federal states.

<sup>10</sup>The states of the former GDR joined the KMK in December 1990 (Lehning 2013).

and students were allowed to select academic areas of focus. Such changes obviously brought about a need for new curricula, but also a desire for common standards. In December 1977, the KMK enacted its “Recommendations for Work in the Gymnasium *Oberstufe*,” which provided a general philosophical and pedagogical framework for these upper grades. Overarching goals for all students and all subjects were “independent learning, scientific-propaedeutic work, and character formation” (Kultusministerkonferenz 1978, 565). While all of these goals would have gained support in the GDR as well, the desired outcomes of a college-preparatory education in (West) Germany clearly signal a contrasting worldview. Both the “individual needs of the learner and the demands of society must be met” (“self-actualization in social responsibility” is listed as a “fundamental goal”), but those needs and demands are not subsumed under a socialist perspective (Ibid., 561).

Arguably the most influential documents produced by the KMK as a result of 1970s education reform—documents which continue to impact education—are the Standardized Examination Requirements for the *Abitur* School-Leaving Exam (EPA). While the EPA leave a great deal of autonomy to individual states, they reflect the federal educational reforms and concerns of the 1970s along with a growing desire to establish a “uniform and appropriate level of requirements” throughout the country (EPA 1989, 3). Each subject covered by the *Abitur* has a separate set of EPA with general guidelines for content, evaluation of written and oral exams, even sample exam exercises. The EPA have been ratified by all federal states and are updated roughly every decade (1979, 1989, 2002, with full implementation two to three years later). In 2012, the KMK revised the EPA to be more competency-oriented; these new *Bildungsstandards* became the basis for the *Abitur* in the 2016–2017 school year.<sup>11</sup> For the sake of convenience, I generally refer to and cite all versions of these documents as the EPA. Because they directly shape the most tangible end-goal of a *Gymnasium* education—the *Abitur* school-leaving exam necessary for admission to university—the EPA can be viewed as the document from which all state-level curricula (and textbooks) trickle down. They therefore play a deciding role in the inclusion of any time period, genre, or author.

<sup>11</sup>The 2012 *Bildungsstandards* were introduced in the 2014/2015 school year, which means that only the newest state curricula and textbooks incorporated them. For more information on implementation dates, see Kultusministerkonferenz (2013).



In their role as federal-level education requirements, the widespread influence of the EPA should not be overlooked. Besides serving as a sort of “über-curriculum,” they impact what is taught in teacher education programs, which then influences what and how the next generation of students is taught. Because a student’s *Abitur* grades often determine not only whether, but often what a student may study at university, consistency and quality of both instruction and testing are paramount, augmenting the importance of the EPA. Just like state curricula, the EPA serve as an internal-feedback machine, shaping and solidifying the (West) German education system.

### SETTING (CONTENT) GOALS: STANDARDIZED EXAMINATION REQUIREMENTS IN (WEST) GERMANY

A closer analysis of the German EPA reveals three aspects which are most relevant to the inclusion and portrayal of GDR literature: the importance of literature and social memory, the role of literary history, and definitions of contemporary and “exemplary” literature. What connects these aspects is a clear concentration in the EPA on literature as cultural legacy. Each version of the EPA emphasizes continuity, exemplarity, and cultural heritage writ large. As we will see later, it is state curricula which then fill this legacy with specific meaning and content.

Although there are changes in the EPA over time, the centrality of literature and its role in passing on cultural memory (or possibly national identity) remains. Whether expressed as “analysis of literary texts” (EPA 1979, 9), “appropriate interaction with texts” (EPA 1989, 9), “comprehending texts and media products” (EPA 2002, 5), or “dealing with texts and media” (EPA 2012, 13), it is clear that literary and nonfictional texts play a large role in the *Abitur*. Interacting specifically with *literary* texts is ascribed “paramount importance” in both the 1989 and 2002 EPA (Ibid.). The role of literature in passing on cultural memory is perhaps most overtly addressed in the 2002 EPA, which introduces the concept of “reliable orientational knowledge (*Orientierungswissen*) of literary and cultural history” (EPA 2002, 3). This includes “shared knowledge of German-language culture as a basis for social discourse as well as the passing on and cultivation of a cultural memory” and “knowledge that serves as a personal orientation in the active engagement with literature and language” (Ibid.). The concept of literary–historical “orientational

knowledge” is repeated at several points throughout the 2002 EPA, but is largely missing from the 1979 and 1989 versions, suggesting that a certain level of shared literary and cultural knowledge may have been viewed as self-evident in pre-1990 West Germany.<sup>12</sup> In a more diverse post-unification Germany, such shared knowledge took on new meaning, which will become evident in state curricula published after reunification. Overall, we see a consistent, clear emphasis on the importance of literature and cultural memory in the EPA, largely defined by Western German discourse.

It is thus entirely logical that literary history plays a central role in the EPA. All versions of the document require students to have a general understanding of German literary history and to be able to explain how major texts are embedded in their historical context. Both the 1989 and 2002 EPA address what appears to have been a concern of members of the KMK that individual states or teachers, if left to their own devices, would ignore older literature. The documents specifically require that “the time before 1900 be adequately included,” with the newer EPA arguing that this is necessary to “illustrate the correspondence between literary tradition and contemporary literature” (EPA 1989, 9; EPA 2002, 6). “Historical importance” is also one of the criteria for selecting literary texts for class instruction (Ibid.).<sup>13</sup> The 2002 document even includes “the comprehension of the historicity of texts” as an important element of “orientational knowledge about literature” (EPA 2002, 10). This entails “historical context, time of creation, author biography, epochs, motif history, context in the history of ideas”—all of which enable students to “take part in contemporary literary life” (Ibid.).<sup>14</sup> Students are expected to understand the social, political, and literary context of literature, but the text itself remains the focal point. This likewise serves as a reminder that textbook research about the GDR should encompass more than history textbooks, as they are not the only encounters that students have with the history and culture of the country.

Although the EPA have long assumed a broad coverage of literary history, it was not until 2002 that a list of essential epochs was included:

<sup>12</sup>The 2012 document does not use the term “orientational knowledge,” but instead refers to “intercultural competence,” “confident dealing with the cultural other” and the “ability to participate in cultural and societal life” (EPA 2012, 13).

<sup>13</sup>The 2012 *Bildungsstandards* do not include any such criteria, likely because they emphasize competencies (output) over content coverage (input).

<sup>14</sup>The 1989 EPA also states that students need to be able to “place a text in its larger context (i.e., literary history, aesthetics, author biography, society)” (12).

Middle Ages, Baroque, Enlightenment, Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, late nineteenth century, twentieth century, and contemporary literature (EPA 2002, 6).<sup>15</sup> Of the nine essential epochs, seven of them are pre-1900, which suggests that “adequate inclusion” should easily be achieved. The list also makes clear that contemporary literature was not (completely) ignored in the *Abitur* or in the classroom; for example, Wolf Biermann is mentioned in the 1979 EPA. Of greatest interest here, however, are the two categories twentieth century and contemporary literature, and what they mean for GDR literature.

While the term contemporary literature (*Gegenwartsliteratur*) is widely used by literary scholars and the general public, it has no set definition, which presents both challenges and opportunities for GDR literature in the schools. Narrowly defined, contemporary literature can be viewed as any text written by a living author, or only as new releases. However, in 1980s Germany, when this study begins, most scholars would have considered texts written after 1945 to be contemporary literature, obviously including GDR/FRG texts. Today, the political events of 1989/1990, which resulted in “new conditions, subjects and ascription of function for literature,” are widely viewed as the line of demarcation between historical (postwar) and contemporary literature (Herrmann and Horstkotte 2016, 2).<sup>16</sup> This shift has ramifications for GDR/FRG literature as it can be viewed as twentieth century literature, postwar literature, contemporary literature, or all/none of the above.

The list in the 2002 EPA seems to suggest that contemporary literature could begin in the year 2000, since twentieth century literature is included as a separate category. GDR/FRG literature certainly counts as twentieth century literature, but with 100 years of texts and many distinct historical eras to choose from (late Empire, WWI, Weimar Republic, Third Reich, postwar, etc.), it would not be surprising if East German literature receives little attention. A pre-1989 requirement of contemporary literature—with a time frame of less than 50 years—would have clearly included GDR/FRG literature and likely guaranteed the inclusion of GDR literature in curricula and textbooks. Such a requirement did not exist at the federal

<sup>15</sup> Ancient and world literature may also be incorporated. The 2012 *Bildungsstandards* require coverage of “literary texts from the Enlightenment to the present” (18). Texts from the Baroque, Middle Ages, and antiquity may be included.

<sup>16</sup> Herrmann and Horstkotte (2016, 2) acknowledge that literary history books often combine postwar and contemporary literature, while still recognizing 1989/1990 as an “epochal turning point” (*Epocheneinschnitt*).

level, however. By the time federal requirements for contemporary literature were initiated, the general definition of the category had shifted to omit pre-1989 texts. No longer viewed as contemporary literature, but not yet old enough to have firmly established itself in the school canon, GDR (and possibly FRG) literature risks being marginalized or silenced in state curricula, new textbooks, and individual classrooms.

The final element of note in the EPA is that of “exemplary” literature. While the EPA do not include required texts and authors, both the 1989 and 2002 versions do list “criteria for the selection of literary texts,” which influence state curricula and eventually textbooks (EPA 1989, 9; EPA 2002, 6).<sup>17</sup> The criteria are quite subjective and rely upon a broad shared understanding of elements such as “aesthetic quality” and “historical significance.”<sup>18</sup> Of greatest interest, however, is the 1989 criteria “exemplary character for an epoch, text type or genre,” shortened simply to “exemplary character” in 2002 (Ibid.). This raises several potential concerns, including who defines “exemplary” post-1945 literature, and whether GDR literature is included in that definition.

State curricula understandably continue this emphasis on exemplarity and significance, commonly using terms such as “important epochs” (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 1999, 6), “major authors” (Bayern 1976, 14), “culturally relevant” (Nordrhein-Westfalen 1999, 41), and “significant works” (Sachsen 2013, 40 and 48). Even the GDR curriculum—not influenced at all by the EPA—repeatedly refers to *bedeutende* (major, renowned, significant) works and authors. Any titles and author names included in state curricula can be assumed to meet that state’s standards for “importance” or “exemplarity.” The decision not to be overly prescriptive at a federal or state level means that defining “exemplary literature” is pushed down the road to individual schools and possibly individual teachers, who are expected to “know it when they see it.” In such cases, the

<sup>17</sup> It is fairly common in the *Oberstufe* for students to read several works in their entirety—therefore these criteria likely are more clearly reflected in curricula than in textbooks themselves.

<sup>18</sup> The criteria in the 1989 EPA are aesthetic quality and historical significance; exemplary of an epoch, text sort, or genre; relevance in the history of motif, form, or style; thematic meaning for students, relating to their lives/world as well as fundamental problems of human existence (9).

The 2002 criteria: aesthetic quality; historical significance; exemplary character; usefulness in reflecting values; relevance in the history of motif, form, and style; connection to the lives/world of students (6).

textbooks (or rather, their authors and publishers) often become the de facto decision-makers about what counts as exemplary literature, leaving the power to shape literary discourse in the hands of (West German) textbook publishers. By 2006, three publishers controlled 90 percent of the textbook market, further consolidating what is defined as exemplary literature (Brandenburg 2006, 52).<sup>19</sup>

This lack of clarity means that GDR literature risks being ignored or treated differently than West German literature because it is viewed as “exemplary” for non-literary reasons: exemplary of state-controlled literature, the SED, the failed socialist state, etc. Many decision-makers may view West German literature as more “exemplary” of its time and as more “important” in German literary history, while East German literature is seen as an aberration, just like the GDR, a dead branch that ultimately did not contribute to the further development of German literature and culture. This could ultimately result in students who only learn about the GDR in history class, with its tendency to highlight the failings of the GDR, rather than being exposed to the important and exemplary literary works produced by its authors, or students who are presented with GDR works predominantly as historical artifacts and FRG texts as the true legacy of post-1945 German literature. Either scenario risks creating a very limited, ideologically focused understanding of the GDR for future generations of students.

### *Competency-Based Education and Changing Views of the Canon*

While the EPA’s prioritization of literature and literary history seems fairly concrete, the imprecision and fluidity of terms like “contemporary” and “exemplary” literature are reminders that cultural and educational discourses are neither monolithic nor static. Therefore, a brief discussion of two additional topics—competency-based education and the canon—is also warranted here. Neither is directly mentioned in the EPA, but their impact can be felt, especially in state curricula.

The pedagogical shift from content to competencies potentially has significant ramifications for the inclusion of GDR, and even FRG, literature. School curricula in Germany have traditionally included detailed lists of required content (input) that was viewed as necessary for all students to

<sup>19</sup>The three publishers—all originally West German companies—are Klett, Cornelsen, and Westermann. Since 2006, the German textbook market has become, if anything, more concentrated in the hands of the top publishers.

learn, often augmented with extensive lists of suggested readings. Newer curricula tend to emphasize competencies (output), or what students should be able to do with the input.<sup>20</sup> Thus, a competency-based curriculum generally includes fewer required topics, texts, and authors. Most curricula developed over the past 20 years are a combination of the two approaches, although the most recent generation of curricula in this analysis (published 2006–2014) included markedly less required content than previous documents.<sup>21</sup> As states reduce the amount of required content, GDR literature risks being forgotten. In contrast to the “classics” and works that have long belonged to the school canon, more contemporary and controversial literature is not automatically part of the institutional memory of textbook authors and teachers in the West. If GDR literature is not specifically mentioned in curricula, it is possible that it will be downplayed or omitted from future textbooks (not to mention classroom instruction).

On the other hand, shifting views of the canon could actually increase the inclusion of GDR and FRG literature. In early curricula (especially in conservative states such as Bayern), the school canon of required readings consisted of pre-WWII texts generally written by men.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the 1982 Nordrhein-Westfalen curriculum directly challenges “the problem of the literary canon” and claims that a “complete picture of collective tradition” is “not plausible for all groups of society” (NRW 1982, 69). Rather than declare a set canon, Nordrhein-Westfalen urges schools to select texts based on guidelines that echo those found in the EPA: thematic relevance, exemplarity of structure/genre, historical relevance, stimulus of communicative competency (Ibid., 68). These criteria still support the traditional canon, but they allow, perhaps encourage, schools and departments to consider other texts as well. The 2002 inclusion of contemporary literature as a requirement in the EPA also underscored the broadening definition of the school canon and is reflected in many state curricula (see Table 2.1 later in this chapter). The expansion of the school

<sup>20</sup>For readers interested in knowing more about the shift to competency-based pedagogy and its effects on teaching and curricula, see Frickel et al. (2012) and Scholl (2009).

<sup>21</sup>This development can be observed in Table 2.1.

<sup>22</sup>The list of required readings in the 1976 Bayern curriculum was adopted from the 1964 version, suggesting a fairly unchanging view of the canon. The most current author included (Thomas Mann), died in 1955. The most current literary text mentioned anywhere in the 1976 curriculum is (Austrian) Peter Handke’s 1967 play *Kaspar*. It is included as a possible text in a unit about language and language difficulties (26).

**Table 2.1** GDR, FRG, and contemporary literature in curricula<sup>a</sup>

	1985	1995	2005	2015
Bayern	(1976) <sup>b</sup> GDR: no FRG: no Cont: included	(1992) GDR: required FRG: required Cont: required	Still using 1992 curriculum	(2004/2009) <sup>c</sup> GDR: required FRG: required Cont: included <sup>d</sup>
GDR/ Mecklenburg- Vorpommern	(GDR 1979) GDR: required FRG: included Cont: required (GDR)	(1991) GDR: required FRG: required Cont: required	(1999) GDR: required (advanced class) FRG: <sup>e</sup> Cont: required	(2006) <sup>f</sup> GDR: included FRG: included Cont: included
Nordrhein- Westfalen	(1982) GDR: included FRG: included Cont: included	Still using 1982 curriculum	(1999) GDR: <sup>g</sup> FRG: <sup>h</sup> Cont: included	(2014) <sup>i</sup> GDR: no FRG: no Cont: included
GDR/Sachsen	(GDR 1979) GDR: Required FRG: included Cont: required (GDR)	(1992) GDR: required FRG: required Cont: required	(2001) GDR: required FRG: required Cont: required	(2004/2013) <sup>j</sup> GDR: required FRG: required Cont: required

<sup>a</sup>This chart does not include mentions of specific authors (e.g., in lists of suggested texts), but rather direct mentions of GDR, FRG, or contemporary literature as a topic

<sup>b</sup>Year of curriculum publication (generally became binding for all grades 2–3 years later)

<sup>c</sup>This curriculum was introduced in 2004 and was updated in 2009. I refer to it as the 2009 curriculum

<sup>d</sup>At least one representative novel from the twentieth or early twenty-first century as well as a work of literature after 1945

<sup>e</sup>Required topic of “post-war and contemporary literature of German-speaking countries” (41,45). In a curriculum from Germany, one can assume this is not just Austria and Switzerland, but it is interesting that only the advanced class specifically requires coverage of GDR literature and *Wendeliteratur*

<sup>f</sup>Mecklenburg-Vorpommern released a “trial” version (*Erprobungsfassung*) of the German curriculum in 2015, but it would not have been implemented in grades 11 and 12 at that time

<sup>g</sup>Curriculum includes suggestions for topics such as “contemporary poetry from 1945 to the present” (54); one could assume that this includes GDR/FRG texts, but they are not specifically mentioned

<sup>h</sup>Curriculum includes suggestions for topics such as “contemporary poetry from 1945 to the present” (54); one could assume that this includes GDR/FRG texts, but they are not specifically mentioned

<sup>i</sup>This curriculum was binding only through grade 11 in the 2015/16 school year. I have included it in this chapter anyway, since it provides a more accurate sense of developments in Nordrhein-Westfalen than would the previous (1999) curriculum

<sup>j</sup>This curriculum was introduced in 2004 and was updated in 2009, 2011, and 2013. I refer to it as the 2013 curriculum

canon allows previously disadvantaged voices—women, GDR authors not published in the FRG, West German authors not associated with the Gruppe 47—to be more likely included in textbooks, if not in curricula.<sup>23</sup>

### *GDR Literature in the EPA*

Although the EPA largely concentrate on goals and required literary epochs, they do not completely ignore GDR literature and authors. They are included in a handful of examples of different types of *Abitur* questions. Only Brecht is the primary topic of test questions on textual analysis (1979, 1989, 2002), but a question for the advanced course imagines a unit on political poetry that would have included Brecht and Biermann and discussed how texts “would be (or were) read differently in the GDR” (EPA 1979, 33; EPA 1989, 37). The 2002 document includes a possible question for the oral exam arising from the unit “Forms of the Modern Novel and Literary Development in Divided Germany,” specifically comparing Grass’ *Die Blechtrommel* and Christa Wolf’s *Kassandra* (EPA 2002, 73). Again, all of these are merely examples of *Abitur* questions, but they signal that it is the consensus of the Ministers of Culture and Education that contemporary GDR and FRG literature belongs on the *Abitur*, and consequently in textbooks and classrooms.

The EPA provide federal input about the scope and goals of German instruction. They place a clear emphasis on the importance of understanding literary texts in their sociopolitical context as well as having a general knowledge of German literary history. In their recognition of cultural sovereignty, the EPA leave many decisions about curricular requirements to individual states, which potentially results in 16 ways to fulfill the EPA standards. Based on the broad goals outlined above, we will now turn our attention to our focus states (Bayern, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Sachsen) to examine how and to what extent they choose to include GDR and FRG literature.

<sup>23</sup>As with many topics in Germany, there has been a public “canon debate.” For more information on the debate and its impact on education, see Stock (2017).



## GDR, FRG, AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE IN STATE CURRICULA

The importance placed in the EPA on studying literature from a wide span of time and the recognition that literature is always embedded in the societal context of its time present opportunities as well as challenges for individual states concerning the inclusion of GDR literature in their curricula. I see this as boiling down to two central questions: (Where) does GDR literature fit in literary history? How is it presented—with a concentration on literary texts or the sociopolitical context?

The chart below reveals at least one clear trait: based solely on inclusion levels in state curricula, GDR literature is treated no differently than FRG literature. Other than in the 1979 GDR curriculum, there is no example of any state in my analysis requiring (or mentioning) one literature and not the other. What the chart also reveals, however, is a shift from requiring GDR/FRG literature to simply including it as a possibility (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) and from including it to omitting it (Nordrhein-Westfalen). Based on other aspects of these curricula, however, it is unclear whether this reflects the shift to competency-based curricula or a deliberate silencing.

It is thus somewhat unexpected that politically conservative Bayern has gone from not even mentioning GDR (or FRG) literature in its 1976 curriculum to requiring it as of 1992. The emphasis in the *Oberstufe* on literary history is one explanation for this development. Many state curricula in the 1970s did not specifically mention or require GDR/FRG literature simply because it was seen as contemporary literature which may or may not establish itself as part of the canon. By 1992, East and West Germany were (recent) history, and their early literary works were 40 years old. Another explanation for this development is the 1989 EPA, which became binding in 1992 and included contemporary literature as a requirement. Because Bayern generally produces more prescriptive (input-based) curricula, however, the inclusion of GDR literature may not be as progressive as it seems: it would be difficult for a federal state to argue in 2009 why it required FRG literature but not GDR. If one is included, the other must be as well.

While comparing curricula over time does reveal the larger shift from input- to output-based (competency-oriented) documents, it also affirmatively answers the first question posed in this section: does GDR literature fit in literary history? Based solely upon inclusion levels in comparison to FRG literature, GDR literature has found a home in state curricula.

## GDR LITERATURE IN CURRICULA 1985–2015

The answer to the second question about GDR literature—whether it is presented with a concentration on literary texts or the sociopolitical context—is more complicated, but simultaneously more important. As a reminder, I am not arguing that either end of the text–context spectrum is better than the other, but a concentration on sociopolitical context does introduce the possibility of ideological critique overshadowing learning about literature. It is at the state curriculum level that we begin to see regional differences and diachronic shifts in the value assigned to GDR literature in the legacy of German literature. In order to more clearly demonstrate regional differences and change over time, my analysis of GDR literature in curricula is divided into three sections: the GDR curriculum, pre-1990 West German curricula, and post-1990 curricula.<sup>24</sup> The analysis of post-1990 curricula most plainly reveals the conflicting and changing answers to the question posed above.

### *GDR Literature in the GDR*

Due to the inescapable goal of producing good socialists, GDR literature is narrowly defined as socialist realist literature (discussed more in Chap. 4), which is prominently included in the highly prescriptive, content-based curriculum. It is highlighted in the grade 11 semester-long topic “socialist realist literature as a co-designer of socialist society” (GDR 1979, 35). Attention is also given to how socialist GDR literature “mobilizes and engages the reader for socialism” (Ibid., 46). The curriculum includes lists of required and suggested GDR texts, and specifies that all students are to read a work of early GDR literature and one from the “immediate present” (Ibid., 51). As one might expect in light of the openly ideological tone of the curriculum, it includes detailed “suggestions for the handling of individual works”; these paragraph-length lists highlight the important

<sup>24</sup>The 1979 GDR curriculum was re-released in 1982 (second edition) and 1985 (third edition). All three editions are identical. It was not until 1988 that any changes were made, although this document says that it was valid as of 1980, suggesting that it should be viewed more as a fourth edition of the 1979 curriculum rather than a new curriculum. Changes are generally minor, with some updating of titles and reorganization of units.

(approved) topics for each text.<sup>25</sup> West German literature is not completely ignored in the GDR curriculum; instead, works of “progressive literature from capitalist countries” are overtly used to further the socialist agenda and to emphasize the “growing influence of the socialist world system” (Ibid., 71). These include West German critiques of the Vietnam War (Peter Weiss’ *Vietnam-Diskurs*, which does not appear in any non-GDR curriculum) and the excesses of capitalist societies (Heinrich Böll’s *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* in the 1988 edition of the curriculum). Emphasis is to be placed on the “impacts of imperialism on the lives of individuals, for example: increased social insecurity and mass manipulation of people, but also protests, resistance, and solidarity of the oppressed” (Ibid., 68). All literature is viewed primarily through the lens of socialist ideology in the effort to create “developed socialist personalities.”

In his analysis of GDR literature in East German POS, Brehmer argues that because of this overt ideological concentration, it logically follows that authors critical of SED socialism were omitted from curricula and textbooks (Brehmer 1987). This has therefore led to two versions of GDR literature: “for the West German reader the familiar view of oppositional or at least critical texts, and for the student in the GDR the mediated view of a ‘socialist national literature’ in accord with the goals of the Party” (Ibid., 213). The literature curriculum for the EOS largely supports Brehmer’s claims. The document makes specific mention of three GDR authors included in my analysis: Bertolt Brecht, Johannes R. Becher, and Anna Seghers, who can undoubtedly be viewed as having produced “socialist national literature.” More critical authors such as Wolf Biermann, Sarah Kirsch—even Christa Wolf—do not appear in the GDR curriculum. The treatment of GDR literature in the 1979 GDR curriculum thus reveals few, if any, surprises. The literary and cultural value of socialist realist literature is emphasized in a semester-long theme, socialist realist authors play a central role, and critical authors are simply omitted. This strictly socialist curriculum stands in stark contrast to its West German counterparts.

<sup>25</sup> In an interview with Petra Labisch (2015), who taught in the GDR, my suspicion that these “suggestions” were actually directives was confirmed; only the official interpretation of a text was to be taught.

### *GDR Literature in Pre-Wende West German Curricula*<sup>26</sup>

The two pre-*Wende* West German curricula in my analysis (Bayern 1976; Nordrhein-Westfalen 1982) fill the federal EPA with contrasting content, reflecting marked differences in attitudes toward GDR literature and literary education itself. The 1976 Bayern curriculum—produced in a politically and socially conservative state—includes very detailed lists of required topics, texts, and authors, but makes no mention whatsoever of GDR (or FRG) literature. The 1982 Nordrhein-Westfalen curriculum is noticeably different, with very few requirements, many pages of suggestions for various ways to select and organize course material, and frequent inclusion of GDR texts and authors. This is reflective of the greater level of acceptance of the GDR and its literature within 1980s Western German society as a whole, as well as within the politically liberal state of Nordrhein-Westfalen itself.

The 1982 Nordrhein-Westfalen curriculum also supports Brehmer's claim that there were two versions of GDR literature. It repeatedly incorporates many regime-critical authors omitted from the GDR curriculum, such as Wolf Biermann, Sarah Kirsch, and Reiner Kunze—all of whom were either forcefully expatriated from the GDR or pressured into defecting to the West. Christa Wolf, one of the most popular GDR authors in the FRG, is well-represented. Popular authors from the GDR curriculum such as Brecht, Becher, and Seghers do appear in the Nordrhein-Westfalen curriculum, but generally in a pre-GDR context, suggesting that they do not embody the West German version of GDR literature. After 1982, Becher does not make another appearance in a Western German curriculum (Bayern or NRW), suggesting that he is viewed in the West as a less-than-exemplary representative of either Expressionist or GDR literature.

Even these few examples from Bayern and Nordrhein-Westfalen begin to reveal the spectrum of value assigned to GDR literature in pre-unification curricula. States such as Bayern represent a much more traditional, conservative view of exemplary literature, with a pre-WWII canon as a focal point. In contrast, states such as Nordrhein-Westfalen distinctly situate contemporary East and West German texts within the literary legacy. These differences serve as a reminder that the *Wende* does not mark

<sup>26</sup>For those not familiar with the term *Wende*, it literally means “turning point” or “change” and is often used to describe the time period surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany.

the beginning of divergent inclusion of GDR literature in state curricula. It is, however, where we will now turn our attention.

### *GDR Literature in Post-Wende Curricula*

It is within the ten post-*Wende* curricula that we most obviously see the contrasting attitudes toward GDR literature and its role within the cultural legacy emphasized by the federal EPA. Beyond the simple question of inclusion vs. omission, state curricula reveal two more nuanced tensions: othering vs. emphasizing shared traits, and a focus on political context vs. literary texts. Differences between states and change over time reflect the complicated legacy of GDR literature and ultimately of the GDR itself.

One of the most common aspects of the depiction of GDR literature in state curricula is separation (or othering) from FRG literature. To some extent, this is understandable: unless one asserts that there was no such thing as “GDR literature,” the terms FRG and GDR literature create two distinct categories that appear in numerous curricula.<sup>27</sup> Some curricula go beyond this widespread distinction, however, and emphasize differences between FRG and GDR literature or establish a connection between FRG literature and German-language literature from Austria and Switzerland (a “Western German-language literature,” if one will) as opposed to GDR literature. The 1992 Bayern curriculum, in a unit for the advanced course on “Postwar and Contemporary Literature of German-Speaking Countries,” serves to illustrate this approach (Bayern 1992, 362). The unit title itself implies that Austria and Switzerland will be covered, and suggested topics include “continuity and development” (literary forms, returning exile authors, etc.) and “politically engaged literature” (confronting the Nazi past, social critique, women’s literature, etc.). What stands out, however, is the final suggested topic “literature in the former GDR” (cultural politics, forms of confrontation, expatriations, etc.)

<sup>27</sup>Some literary scholars and authors insist on the term “literature of/from the GDR,” others question the term “GDR literature” used in connection with authors who defected or with post-1990 texts.

Terms such as “GDR literature” and “FRG literature” also raise the question of whether a German “national literature” exists. The GDR government placed a high value on the idea of a *Nationalalliteratur*, so a post-unification insistence that it does not exist is a very deliberate ideological statement by many scholars and authors. While intriguing, this debate goes far beyond the bounds of my analysis. For a more detailed examination, see Heukenkamp 1995.

(Ibid.). The placement at the end of the list as well as the title both indicate that GDR literature does not belong together with the previous topics, that while it is a part of “literature of German-speaking countries,” it should not be viewed in the same way as West German, Swiss, or Austrian literature. This separation is highlighted here by the suggested topics for GDR literature, which imply that GDR literature is best used to show the negative side of the SED regime. The emphasis is more on ideology (and ideological critique) and less on literary value.

Elsewhere in the 1992 Bayern curriculum, the othering of GDR literature is made more visible. An excerpt from the “Suggestions for Reading Selections” at the end of the curriculum includes the following:

*Literature of the Twentieth Century—Novels and Narratives*

- by St. Heym, Ch. Wolf, J. Becker, Braun, Hein, Loest, Plenzdorf, etc.
- by Böll, Dürrenmatt, Frisch, Grass, Handke, Johnson, M. Walser and other authors of post-war and contemporary literature. (Ibid., 367)

The strict visual separation of GDR and FRG/Austrian/Swiss authors is then emphasized by the phrase “and other authors of post-war and contemporary literature,” again implying that GDR literature is something apart from the rest of German-language literature.<sup>28</sup> It is not only Bayern that highlights this separation; the 2013 Sachsen curriculum requires students to develop competency in “positioning themselves in regards to literature of the FRG until 1989 in the tension between tradition and experiment” as well as “positioning themselves in regards to GDR literature in the tension between exodus and confrontation” (Sachsen 2013, 42, 50).<sup>29</sup> Those topics already reveal differences, but the suggested additional topic for FRG literature on the “relationship to the literature of Austria and Switzerland”—which is not listed for GDR literature—shows that even curriculum writers in Sachsen have internalized this othering (Ibid.). It is especially telling that the Sachsen curricula from 1992 and

<sup>28</sup> I acknowledge that Uwe Johnson is from the GDR, but he defected to the West in 1959. In this context, I do not believe that he is being presented here as a (token) GDR author.

<sup>29</sup> This also exemplifies the shift from content/input to competencies/output. Curricula are no longer primarily lists of required content, but instead guidelines for what students should be able to do with the content.

2001 also group GDR literature separately from FRG, Austrian, and Swiss literature in their required units on literature after 1945. As Bayern was Sachsen's main "partner state" for educational matters in the immediate post-*Wende* years, it is quite possible that Sachsen adopted the concept directly from existing curricula in Bayern. It is an established trait by 2013, not a new development.

This does not mean, however, that GDR literature is only included as an example of the "other" German literature. There are several curricula which emphasize shared traits and developments between East and West German literature, and which include GDR literature in a "non-GDR" context, signifying its full belonging to German literary history. The progressive 1982 Nordrhein-Westfalen curriculum, which was valid until 1999, does both by including GDR literature in all four sample course designs.<sup>30</sup> It appears in various contexts, from a comparison of epistolary novels (Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* and Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*) to "poetry in the GDR" as part of a larger unit on contemporary poetry. Many suggested topics, such as "current youth problems" or "reception of classicism" offer opportunities to include GDR literature as well (NRW 1982, 104, 110). The year-long topic of grade 13, "Language and Literature—Traditions, Breaks in Tradition, and New Beginnings in the 20th Century" includes Avant-garde literature from the early twentieth century, literature in National Socialism, and FRG/GDR literature (Ibid., 119). This last unit is titled "Federal Republic of Germany and German Democratic Republic—Two States, Two Languages, Two Literatures?" with the question mark in the title encouraging students and teachers to look past initial impressions (Ibid., 121). The skills practiced here include "identifying similarities and differences in the development of German literature in the Federal Republic and in the GDR" (Ibid.). The first post-unification curriculum from Sachsen (mentioned in the previous paragraph about othering—revealing the difficult and divisive decisions states face) also at times underscores the connection between FRG and GDR literature by requiring students to study similar topics for both, such as "encounters with individual alienation" or "dealing with the past," although these topics are no longer included by 2001 (Sachsen 1992, 80). Both the 1992 and 2001 Sachsen curricula stipulate that students in the basic course "will gain

<sup>30</sup>Suggested courses are organized around processes of communication and understanding, problems, historical connections, text types and genres.

insight into the literary developments of both German states and will learn about moments of differentiation as well as similarities,” closely echoing the 1982 Nordrhein-Westfalen curriculum (Ibid.; Sachsen 2001, 87). The requirement for the advanced course clarifies these similarities as “similarities of aesthetic approaches,” emphasizing the literary elements of each text (Sachsen 1992, 97; Sachsen 2001, 97). In these examples, GDR literature is presented both as a product of its sociopolitical context and as part of German literature as a whole.

Perhaps the most striking tendency across curricula, however, is the emphasis on historical and political context of (or over) literary texts. In the frequently terse language of curricula, this is easy to overlook, as it is often revealed through single words or phrases. The 1992 Bayern curriculum provides a helpful example, again in its grade 13 unit on contemporary literature, which includes three requirements:

- Political and social conditions: division and reunification of Germany
- Conditions of literature in the former GDR: cultural politics of the SED and their effects
- Developments in literature of the FRG: polarizing tendencies, literature of the Adenauer era, the politicization of literature, New Subjectivity (Bayern 1992, 351)

Notice that FRG literature is viewed as having undergone aesthetic and cultural “developments” since WWII, whereas GDR literature experienced “conditions.” This suggests a stagnancy and lack of autonomy in GDR literature, subtly implying that it is of lesser literary quality, and that little changed from 1950s socialist realism to the decidedly experimental works of the 1980s. This is underscored by the required topic “cultural politics of the SED and their effects,” which emphasizes the political context of GDR literature over the aesthetic elements of the texts themselves. Clearly, SED politics and policies influenced the published literature of the GDR, but that does not mean that GDR texts should not be read for their literary value. In contrast, FRG literature is viewed as responding to politics rather than being controlled by them, and at least two stylistic aspects are highlighted (politicization and New Subjectivity). The “cultural politics of the SED and their effects” could just as easily belong in a history curriculum; within this context, literature risks simply being the vehicle for ideological critique. This prominence of politics over aesthetics is reflected in many textbooks used in Bayern, especially as the 1992 curriculum was



binding until 2009.<sup>31</sup> The 2009 curriculum is somewhat more even-handed, acknowledging the creative aspects of GDR literature in required topics such as “grappling with the past in East and West Germany,” but still continuing to imply an inherent difference in GDR literature in the required “overview of literary tendencies: engaged literature, hermetic poetry, theater of the absurd, literature in the GDR, postmodernism, developments in contemporary literature” (Bayern 2009). The message seems to be that literary developments worth learning about were not necessarily happening in the GDR.

The prominence of political context over literary texts is not only found in Bavarian curricula, however, and it does not necessarily decrease over time. The 1991 and 1999 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern curricula reveal an increasingly critical depiction of GDR literature. In the 1991 curriculum, GDR literature is included in the larger grade 12 unit “Selected Works of Twentieth-Century Literature,” which was designed to “develop a productive engagement with important works of the immediate past and present” (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 1991, 50). GDR literature appears as part of “German-language literature in confrontation with the societal reality of the FRG and the GDR until 1989 and with the *Wende*,” and the phrase “literature in confrontation with societal reality” acknowledges the political context of literature without ignoring literature itself (Ibid.). In contrast, the 1999 curriculum includes GDR literature in the grade 13 unit “Familiar and Foreign,” whose overarching goal is the following:

Students will interact largely independently with selected texts by German, European, and non-European authors of the twentieth century. Via selected works and contexts, students will gain an impression and overview of the variety of overlapping and contrasting literary currents in twentieth century Germany, of the multiple relationships between state, society, literature, cultural history and intellectual history. (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 1999, 37)

At first glance, the 1999 curriculum presents the same balanced attention to literary texts within their political context. This becomes more

<sup>31</sup> Bayern is one of the German states for which there are often state-specific editions of textbooks. By 2015, it does not have any approved textbooks for *Oberstufe* German in common with Mecklenburg-Vorpommern or Sachsen. Nordrhein-Westfalen stopped publishing lists of approved books for *Oberstufe* German in the mid-1980s. Schools there are allowed to choose (nearly) any book they see fit.

problematic, though, in the detailed information for the advanced course.<sup>32</sup> Here “literature of the GDR” is listed separately from “postwar and contemporary literature of German-speaking countries,” echoing many other curricula. While students are required to learn about “topics and motifs” of Western German literature, that requirement is missing for GDR literature, possibly implying that there aren’t any worth discussing. The corresponding suggestions for teaching GDR literature then include the “cultural politics of the SED and their effects, forms of confrontation, expatriations, literary controversies,” which is reminiscent of the 1992 Bayern curriculum (*Ibid.*, 46). This is in contrast to the suggestions that are associated with FRG literature, which emphasize “conflicts and problems of post-war societies” and include themes such as “confrontation with the Third Reich and its consequences; social affluence and the outsider; threats to humans and nature; women’s literature; regional literature” (*Ibid.*, 41).<sup>33</sup> The implication is clear: FRG literature is worthy of being viewed as literature, while GDR literature is merely a victim of politics. Even the suggested topic of GDR “literary controversies” risks downplaying the literature at the heart of the controversy. What is most noteworthy is that this increasing level of critique is taking place in a former GDR state. Rather than (a more expected?) immediate backlash against 40 years of SED rule in the early 1990s, it seems that curriculum writers in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern were possibly influenced by the more critical tone of societal discourse about the GDR in the late 1990s.<sup>34</sup>

Some of these examples may seem minor, even picky, but at times they are the only inclusion of GDR literature in a curriculum. To some extent, this near omission likely captures the attitudes of many educational leaders

<sup>32</sup>The 1991 curriculum does not differentiate basic and advanced courses.

<sup>33</sup>The use of the term “societies” rather than “society” does imply that GDR literature could be included in this topic. The tabular presentation of topics for the basic course leaves this open to interpretation. The table for the advanced course visually separates these topics from “literature of the GDR” (45–46).

The basic course does not require (or even list) GDR literature, although it includes the same suggestions as the advanced course.

<sup>34</sup>For reference, here is all that the 2006 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern curriculum says about GDR literature. In the semester-long topic “Literature and Language in Comparison—Focus on Twentieth and Twenty-First Century,” one area of emphasis is “Living and Writing in Times of Upheaval.”

“Two of the following three topics are required: The time of national socialism in literature and language; literature after 1945: literature of the GDR and FRG; literature after 1989” (21).

about the importance of GDR literature, but it also simply reflects the abbreviated style of curricula, many of which do not mention FRG literature in great detail either. When little is said, the few words used carry more weight. Consequently, these brief phrases have a large impact on textbook authors, and any textbook edition is potentially used by thousands of teachers and students.

## CONCLUSION

Although textbooks are often the most visible education documents, they are actually at the end of a long chain of discourses and decisions. Countries with strongly contrasting political ideologies, such as East and West Germany, create markedly different education systems and set dissimilar content requirements for literature instruction. In post-*Wende* Germany, the EPA provide some level of commonality and establish the centrality of literature as cultural legacy. This shared emphasis is then interpreted differently by each federal state over time, which results in divergent approaches to including GDR literature in state curricula. Running through those differences, however, are two shared tensions: inclusion vs. othering, and focus on literary text vs. historical context. As we shall see in the case studies of individual authors, these differences do not stop at the curricular level, but carry through to textbooks.

These tensions, and the disparate methods of addressing them, reflect larger societal discourses about the value and legacy of GDR literature. Pre-1990 GDR documents celebrate GDR literature—as long as it is socialist realist literature—while similar documents in the FRG either ignore (Bayern) or celebrate (NRW) all contemporary literature. After the fall of the Wall and the collapse of the GDR, attitudes shifted, with attention often being placed more predominantly on critiquing the political system of the GDR and using GDR literature to do so. This runs the risk of GDR literary texts being presented in textbooks (and classroom instruction) more as historical documents than as creative works with aesthetic value. It also significantly downplays the cultural and artistic achievements of the GDR and its citizens, relegating GDR literature to the status of evidence in the comparison of political systems. While discourse in Germany has moved beyond the rather unrefined concentration of the early 1990s on political oppression and perpetrator/victim, such viewpoints are still found in state curricula. It remains to be seen whether the next generation of curricula merely perpetuate the current feedback loop, or whether they present a new view of the GDR and its literature.

This uncertainty brings with it vastly different outcomes for textbooks and students. GDR literature may come to be viewed as an integral part of German-language literary history, or it may be cast aside as a doomed historical development. Future students may learn about the GDR only through government documents in history classes, or they may continue to encounter the country's rich literary legacy. While we cannot see the future, we can learn from the developments of the past 35 years. Let us therefore turn our attention to the case studies of individual GDR authors.

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## Everybody Loves Brecht

Bertolt Brecht is one of the best-known German authors of the twentieth century, and his high inclusion levels in textbooks are to be expected. Brecht's poems, plays, and theoretical writings appear in nearly every analyzed textbook, frequently in double-digit numbers.<sup>1</sup> His works are most often included in chapters on the Weimar Republic, authors in exile, or drama (theory), but also in chapters about love poems or the role of the individual in society. There is no question that Brecht is an important figure in German literary history.

There is a question about how to classify Brecht, however: as a German author of the Weimar Republic, a GDR author, or an author beyond political boundaries. With a career extending from the 1910s to his death in 1956, Brecht represents several radically differing literary contexts. In contrast to Brecht scholars, who seek to explicate the nuances of Brecht's political beliefs and literary production, textbook authors are required to simplify, to focus on "exemplary" texts and authors, to present literary history in broad strokes rather than in detail; they thus face difficult decisions about Brecht in a GDR context. Do his nearly seven years of writing

<sup>1</sup>Only two analyzed textbooks, *Erkennendes Lesen* (1976) and *Literarisches Leben* (1982), do not include Brecht texts.

and directing theater in the GDR deserve inclusion in textbooks?<sup>2</sup> If so, should they be mentioned in informational texts or illustrated via poems and texts by Brecht himself? How much attention should be given to Brecht's personal politics and the politics of the GDR? A staunch Marxist who never joined the Communist Party or the SED and was unafraid to point out the shortcomings of SED socialism, Brecht did not always fulfill the government's ideal of the "all-round developed socialist personality." In the West, Brecht's support of socialism, including his choice to live in the GDR, was problematic. Everybody loved (and loves) Brecht, but not everything about him. This dilemma leads to varying, sometimes unexpected, decisions of how to portray Brecht in literature textbooks. Some choose to address the complications, others ignore them completely, while still others nearly tie themselves in linguistic knots in an attempt to present a sanitized, simplified version of Bertolt Brecht.

My argument is that both "sides"—East and West—claim Brecht as theirs through various means, while simultaneously ignoring the inconvenient elements of his life and work. The GDR proudly situated Brecht as a socialist author, and even after reunification, the curricula for Sachsen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern place greater emphasis on Brecht in the GDR than do the Western German states of Bayern and Nordrhein-Westfalen. While post-unification textbooks, largely produced by publishers in the West, reflect a greater willingness to acknowledge Brecht's GDR writings, they predominantly portray him in opposition to SED cultural politics, therefore indirectly claiming him as well by presenting him as *in* the GDR but not truly *of* the GDR. FRG or GDR author? The answer depends on who is telling the story.

### INCLUSION AND PORTRAYAL OF BRECHT BEFORE 1990

Brecht's Marxist beliefs and dedication to literary realism shaped his writing from early on, and they help explain why the GDR was so quick to claim him as one of theirs. The GDR curriculum very explicitly positions Brecht as a socialist (realist) author, including him in lists of suggested and required texts in three of the four major thematic units for grades 11 and

<sup>2</sup> Brecht returned to the Soviet Occupation Zone in October 1948; the Berliner Ensemble was formed in 1949.

12.<sup>3</sup> Several of his works—both pre- and post-1945—are presented in thematic unit IV: “Humanism and Realism in Classic(al) Literature and Their Meaning for Socialist National Culture,” which includes texts going back to the ancient Greeks. Brecht is prominently presented as a socialist author who plays an important role in GDR literary history, with its focus on “new literary heroes,” “cultural heritage” and “socialist reality” (GDR 1979, 46 and 72).

Brecht’s role as a contemporary (post-1945) writer is also addressed in the GDR curriculum, which includes him in thematic unit II: “Socialist Realist Literature as a Co-creator of Socialist Society.” This unit is split between GDR literature (21 hours) and Soviet literature (11 hours) and includes Brecht’s play *Die Tage der Commune* (*The Days of the Commune*) in a list of 13 suggested texts (of which students must read four to six).<sup>4</sup> Written in 1949 and first performed in 1956, the play is set in the short-lived socialist Paris Commune of 1871. The “suggested” discussion topics for the play emphasize socialist ideas, including “the people as the primary force of history,” the “contrast between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie,” and the “parallels between the historical events and the revolutionary changes in Germany after 1945” (Ibid., 53). Attention is to be paid as well to the “position of the play in Brecht’s oeuvre and in GDR drama,” clearly positioning both Brecht and the play in a GDR context (Ibid.). It is worth noting that *Die Tage der Commune* does not appear in any other curriculum or textbook in my analysis, suggesting that curriculum designers in a non-GDR setting do not view the text as exemplary of Brecht’s work.

Pre-unification West German curricula naturally present a stark contrast to the emphasis on socialism and Brecht’s post-1949 importance found in the GDR curriculum. Brecht is mentioned quite often in both the Nordrhein-Westfalen and Bayern curricula, but Bayern never establishes a GDR context for his writing. The only post-WWII Brecht text included in the Bayern curriculum is his 1949 “Kleines Organon für das Theater” (“A

<sup>3</sup>The four thematic units (*Themenkomplexe*) are (1) Realistic Literature in Capitalist Society from the Beginnings of the Workers’ Movement to the Great Socialist October Revolution; (2) Socialist Realist Literature as a Co-creator of Socialist Society; (3) Bourgeois and Socialist Realist Literature in the Fight against Imperialism and War and for Social Progress; (4) Humanism and Realism in Classic(al) Literature and Their Meaning for Socialist National Culture.

<sup>4</sup>By 1988, these guidelines had been reduced slightly, with GDR literature being assigned 17 hours. The list of suggested texts was the same, but students only had to read three to four complete works.

Short Organum for the Theatre”), in a list of recommended texts on “Poetics and Literary Theory” (Bayern 1976, 114). The Nordrhein-Westfalen curriculum, which does not require any texts (instead providing examples of possible course designs), does at least hint at a possible post-1945 context for Brecht in several lists of suggested authors. For example, the grade 12 unit on “modern ‘classics’” positions Brecht between pre-war and post-war authors: “Kafka, Musil, Brecht, Frisch and Grass and others” (NRW 1982, 119). As most lists in this curriculum are presented in chronological order, this listing at least opens up the possibility of Brecht as a post-WWII author, although the connection is admittedly tentative. At no point does either curricula position Brecht in a GDR context.

The overall portrayal of Brecht in pre-1990 textbooks quite plainly echoes the situation in curricula. While including many of the same texts that appear in West German textbooks, the GDR textbook *Literatur 11/12* also contains more obviously socialist texts, such as “Über sozialistischen Realismus” (“On Socialist Realism”) (1964), “Kohlen für Mike” (“Coals for Mike”) (1926), “Die Teppichweber von Kujan-Bulak ehren Lenin” (“The Carpet Weavers of Kujan-Bulak Honor Lenin”) (1929), and Brecht’s acceptance speech for the Lenin Prize for Strengthening Peace Among Peoples (1955).<sup>5</sup> These last three texts all appear in the chapter “Humanism and Realism in Classic(al) Literature and Their Meaning for Socialist National Culture,” situating Brecht as part of a larger German literary heritage while highlighting his socialist credentials. As the textbook contains no reading comprehension questions or informational texts, inclusion and positioning of texts are crucial elements that contribute to forming an image of an author. Pre-1990 FRG textbooks predictably present a much different version of Brecht, generally avoiding any overt mention of the GDR or socialist realism. Of the seven books analyzed, five include Brecht texts, and of those five, only *Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* includes a chapter on German literature after 1945, although Brecht does not appear there. While other textbooks include post-1945 texts by Brecht, they do not present them in a specific sociopolitical context. Brecht is depicted as an important part of (West) German literary

<sup>5</sup>When Brecht received the prize, it was called the International Stalin Prize for Strengthening Peace Among Peoples. The name was changed in 1957. Other authors in my analysis also awarded the prize were Anna Seghers (1951) and Johannes R. Becher (1952). The textbook and curriculum both use the name Lenin rather than Stalin.

history, but the uncomfortable political elements of that history are simply ignored. The dual (and dueling) portrayals of Brecht can clearly be seen.

Pre-1990 portrayals of Brecht thus fit quite neatly into two categories: GDR glorification of Brecht's role as a socialist writer, and FRG emphasis on Brecht as a prolific, socially critical but somehow not Socialist pre-1945 writer. A few FRG textbooks challenge this portrayal, but even they do not position Brecht as a GDR author. To some extent, this is due to the fact that few textbooks in use in 1985 include biographical or informational texts, and many do not yet have reading questions. Therefore, text selection and grouping alone create an author's portrayal within a textbook. The choice of many 1985 textbook authors not to include chapters on post-1945 literature reduces the chances (or necessity) of featuring Brecht's later writings as well.

## POST-UNIFICATION PORTRAYALS

### *Brecht in Curricula*

Brecht's inclusion in post-1990 curricula reflects gradual changes in curricular styles as well as a continued divide in Eastern and Western German views of the author himself. Curricula in use in 1995 reflect a high-point of inclusion and "claiming" of Brecht in curricula, while by 2015, his name has completely disappeared from curricula in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Nordrhein-Westfalen—a reflection of the decreasingly prescriptive nature of literature curricula throughout the country.

While the curricula in use in 1995 in Bayern (published 1992) and Nordrhein-Westfalen (1982) continue to reflect the pre-*Wende* West German view of Brecht, curricula for the former East German states of Sachsen (1992) and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (1991) both position Brecht as a post-1945 and GDR author. While ridding themselves of much of the socialist realist literature required in the GDR curriculum, both states still include more GDR authors than do Bayern or Nordrhein-Westfalen.<sup>6</sup> Besides including Brecht in units on the Weimar Republic and poetry, Sachsen also suggests he be included in the grade 12 basic course

<sup>6</sup>One potential explanation for this is that both curricula came out very quickly after reunification (1991 and 1992), so there was likely a desire/need to keep at least some elements from the old curriculum. Furthermore, GDR literature can be viewed as regional literature in Sachsen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

unit “Literature of the ‘Returnees’ and Their Position in West and East” (Sachsen 1992, 80).<sup>7</sup> Brecht’s role as a pre- and post-1945 writer is emphasized in the grade 12 basic course poetry unit, which includes two lists of suggested authors for twentieth century poetry: one with pre-1945 authors (such as Gottfried Benn and Rainer Maria Rilke) that includes “early Brecht,” and one for post-1945 authors (such as Sarah Kirsch and Erich Fried) which simply lists “Brecht” (Ibid, 82). It is the grade 12 advanced course that most obviously claims Brecht as a GDR author, however. In the extended unit on GDR literature, the required topic of “designing and forming utopia” suggests the following authors—Brecht, Braun, Hacks, Fühmann, and Christa Wolf (Ibid, 97). Such claiming is found in the 1991 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern curriculum as well. Grade 12 covers twentieth-century literature, with one of the themes being “German-language literature in confrontation with social reality in the FRG and the GDR until 1989 and with the *Wende*” (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 1991, 51). This is followed by two lists of authors:

- Bachmann, Böll, Eich, Enzensberger, Fried, Grass, Handke, Lenz, and others
- Braun, Brecht, Bobrowski, Hein, Heym, H. Kant, Kunert, Biermann, Loest, Kirsch, Mensching/Wenzel, Wolf, Seghers, and others

What may not be apparent upon first glance is that the lists are strictly divided between FRG/Austria/Switzerland and the GDR, and that Brecht is placed together with GDR authors. In contrast to Nordrhein-Westfalen and Bayern, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen emphasize Brecht’s role as a post-1945 author who lived and wrote in the GDR. He is explicitly claimed as one of theirs.

By 2005, this claiming of Brecht as a GDR author by Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen has weakened. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, much of this is due to changes in curriculum style: rather than include author names in the body of the document (where they are clearly associated with specific topics), they are only included in lists of recommended authors and texts. It is therefore difficult to discern how Brecht is being categorized when he only appears as “Bertolt Brecht—dramas (i.e., *Leben des Galilei*), poetry” (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 1999, 57). Sachsen has

<sup>7</sup>Along with Johannes R. Becher, Anna Seghers, Thomas Mann, Alfred Döblin, Arnold Zweig. The topic is required, while the authors are suggested.

also made some changes in its curriculum, most noticeably streamlining its required topics. Brecht is still a suggested author for the topic “literature of the post-war years: confrontation with fascism and war,” but the previously required topic of utopian literature in the GDR has been dropped completely (Sachsen 2001, 97). This implies less a shift in how Brecht himself is viewed than in how GDR literature and/or curricula as a whole are viewed. After the high point of the early 1990s, former GDR states are less overtly claiming Brecht as a GDR author, but they still more explicitly position him in a post-1945 context than do former West German states.

Brecht’s low inclusion rates in curricula used in 2015 mirror trends for other authors. Neither Nordrhein-Westfalen (2014) nor Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (2006) mention any author names, and Sachsen (2013) mentions Brecht only in the context of epic theater. Only Bayern (2009) broadens its traditional inclusion of Brecht by placing him in a post-1945 context—albeit not specifically a GDR context—in its list of suggested readings. He appears in both the drama and poetry sections of “literature from 1945 to the present,” together with FRG and GDR authors.

While Brecht is consistently positioned as an important German author in post-unification curricula, this does not consistently extend to Brecht as a GDR author. After a strong claiming by the former GDR states of Sachsen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brecht has become less and less associated with the literature of the socialist state in which he spent the last years of his life. This is predominantly due to the shift away from content-based curricula toward competency-based curricula, but it does leave more decisions in the hands of individual textbook authors and publishers.

### *Brecht in Textbooks*

After German reunification Brecht’s texts appear noticeably more frequently in a post-1945 context. Much of this is due to the fact that more textbooks actually include a chapter on literature after 1945, but textbook authors are also actively deciding to include Brecht in that category. From 1995 on, at least three analyzed textbooks for each year (1995, 2005, 2015) include texts by Brecht in their chapters such as “The Post-War Era and GDR” (*Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen* 1989), “Literature in the GDR” (*Texte, Themen und Strukturen* 1999), or “Political Counterworlds” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010). Of these 11 textbooks, seven include at least one poem from the Buckow Elegies. Other popular texts are “Deutschland 1952” (“Germany 1952”), “Kinderhymne” (“Children’s Anthem”), and

“Ich habe dies, du hast das” (I have this, you have that).<sup>8</sup> While some textbooks present Brecht only in an immediate post-WWII (and consequently pre-GDR) context, even this is a marked change from 1985. Textbooks likewise include Brecht in informational texts about post-war literature, the role of returning exile authors, and developments in GDR literature. In contrast to pre-1990 textbooks, those used after reunification include information *about* Brecht and texts *by* Brecht in a GDR context.

While trends in curricular design have generally been toward less detailed material, trends in textbook design have moved in an opposite direction. Within the past 30 years, textbooks have morphed from simple anthologies (perhaps with a few reading comprehension questions) to collections of literary, informational, and biographical texts. On the one hand, this makes textbooks more accessible to students—they do not have to rely on teachers (or knowledge possibly not yet gained in other classes) to see the “bigger picture”—while on the other hand, it gives individual textbooks much more power in shaping students’ understanding. The portrayal of an author is no longer determined solely by which literary texts are included in a textbook, but how these texts (and the authors themselves) are contextualized, explained, and critiqued. Two specific examples—biographical texts about Brecht and the Buckow Elegies—serve to illustrate this change and will be discussed in detail below.

### *Biographical Texts About Brecht*

Biographical texts about Brecht reflect market-wide developments in textbooks while also revealing the ideological challenge that Brecht continues to pose for textbook authors and publishers. As a group, these texts demonstrate a growing willingness over time to acknowledge Brecht’s Marxist beliefs and his time in the GDR, but individual texts reveal noticeable differences in the level of nuance and explanation of the biographical facts of Brecht’s life. Problematic elements are frequently downplayed or omitted completely, and the definition of “problematic” is rather fluid.

One very simple element of biographical texts—information about place of death—illustrates how seemingly basic information about Brecht

<sup>8</sup>Some pre-1945 poems are presented in a post-1945 context, such as “Rückkehr” (1943/44) in the “Literature since 1945” chapter of *Passagen* or “Gegen Verführung” (1925) in the “Poetry since 1945” chapter of *P.A.U.L. D.*



can take on ideological importance. In the 1985 textbooks, biographical information is generally limited to birth and death dates included in the author index. Only one textbook, *fragen*, includes places of birth and death, and it informs students that Brecht “died in Berlin” (*fragen* 1972, 273).<sup>9</sup> Not East Berlin, but Berlin. The decision to identify the city of Brecht’s death as Berlin carries over into the 1995 corpus as well, where *Arbeit mit Texten* (1993) and *Texte und Methoden 11* and *12* (1992 and 1993) do the same. What is striking, however, is that different decisions were made about Johannes R. Becher, who died in East Berlin as well. *Texte und Methoden 11* and *12* list Becher’s place of death as East Berlin, while *Arbeit mit Texten* lists it as Berlin. It therefore appears that *Arbeit mit Texten* is making a political statement about the division of Berlin, but that *Texte und Methoden 11* and *12* are making a similarly political statement about where Brecht belongs, essentially claiming him for the West.<sup>10</sup> This decision was altered by the time *Texte und Methoden 13* (1994) was published; the author index here lists the city as East Berlin, possibly signaling both a greater desire for accuracy and a greater willingness to associate Brecht with the GDR. By 2005, most textbooks have switched to longer biographical entries, which either list Brecht’s place of death as East Berlin or do not specifically mention it at all. The one exception is *Texte, Themen und Strukturen*, which informs students that Brecht “returned to Germany (East Berlin)” after WWII, but that he “died in Berlin” (*TTS* 1999, 57). Overall there is increasing willingness to acknowledge this basic (yet evidently problematic) connection of Brecht to the GDR.

Starting in the 1990s, many textbooks include at least some additional biographical information about selected authors, ranging from a few sentences before individual texts to several paragraphs in separate text boxes or in the margins. As is to be expected, nearly all the biographical texts about Brecht mention his status as a socially critical author, his time in exile, and his role in developing German (epic) theater. The differences are found in how the source of Brecht’s social critique is depicted, as well as the attention given to his time in the GDR. While the small sample size limits my ability to make broad claims, it appears that the willingness of

<sup>9</sup>Unfortunately, *fragen* does not include any authors more commonly defined as “GDR authors,” so it is impossible to know if this reticence to acknowledge Brecht’s GDR connection is more about Brecht or about the GDR.

<sup>10</sup>*Arbeit mit Texten* was approved for use in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen, while *Texte und Methoden* was approved for use in Bayern and Sachsen, thus thwarting any easy “East Germany acknowledges East Berlin, but West Germany denies it” claims.

textbook authors to present Brecht as an author in the GDR, if not fully a “GDR author,” is growing over time.

One obvious area of change is the discussion of Brecht and Marxism. In the three textbooks used in 1995 that include biographical texts about Brecht, only *Blickfeld Deutsch* (1991) informs students that the content of Brecht’s early plays “oriented itself around Marxism” and that his epic theater intended to “position Marxist ways of thinking against capitalist reality” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 1991, 363). Brecht himself is described as a “supporter of the revolution” who produced “anti-bourgeois” works (Ibid, 362). In contrast, *Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen* (1990) makes no mention of Marxism, merely describing Brecht as the “most important German-language political author” since 1933 (*Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen* 1990, 216). There is no hint at what Brecht’s politics were—unless students are supposed to assume that Expressionism was a unified political movement. By 2005, two of three biographies (*Blickfeld Deutsch* [2003] and *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* [1999]) address Brecht’s Marxist convictions, with *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* including Brecht’s claim that epic theater was “always Marxist theater” (*TTS* 1999, 57). It is somewhat surprising that *Literatur*—published by the former GDR textbook publisher Volk und Wissen—does not specifically mention Marxism, Communism, or Socialism. The only hint of Brecht’s politics comes in the brief telegraph-style entries typical of this textbook: “1947 questioning before the House Un-American Activities Committee” and “return: entry into West Germany denied” (*Literatur* 1998, 354). By 2015, all four textbooks mention Marxism and/or Communism, with *Deutsch 12* (2010) and *KombiKOMPAKT-N* (2012) both mentioning the “defining” role that Marxism played in Brecht’s writing (*Deutsch 12* 2010, 90; *KombiKOMPAKT-N* 2012, 60). *P.A.U.L. D.* (2013) also addresses Brecht’s “Marxist convictions” and his “closeness to Communism,” which resulted in his being “distrustfully observed” during exile in the USA (*P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 361).<sup>11</sup> Brecht’s Marxist beliefs—and the role they played in his life and works—seem to become more readily acknowledged over time.

In contrast to the varying degrees of acknowledgement of Brecht’s Marxist leanings, biographical texts in all post-unification textbooks mention that Brecht lived (and/or died) in the GDR. Most texts do not devote much space to the GDR, but that is understandable when one is trying to

<sup>11</sup> *Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010 is the fourth book that includes Marxism in the Brecht bio.

sum up an author's life in a paragraph. All analyzed textbooks mention Brecht's 1948 move to the GDR, using phrases such as "went to East Berlin," "settled in the GDR," or "returned to Germany (East Berlin)"<sup>12</sup> The differences appear when one looks for the reason behind that decision. Brecht scholars would quickly point to his 1947 appearance before the Un-American Activities Committee, West Germany's (more precisely the American Occupation Zone's) subsequent refusal to allow him entry, and East Germany's strong support of his playwriting and directing as obvious reasons for this move.<sup>13</sup> Textbook authors seem to have mixed feelings about informing students of these elements of Brecht's biography. Of the ten post-*Wende* textbooks including biographical texts about Brecht, five of them say nothing about why Brecht lived in the GDR.<sup>14</sup> *P.A.U.L. D.* (2013) hints at the reason, stating that "after his return to Europe, Brecht decided to locate in the GDR" (*P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 361). This is directly after information about Brecht's hearing with the House Committee on Un-American Activities, so very astute students might see a connection. *Blickfeld Deutsch* informs students using any of the three editions (1991, 2003, 2010) that "because he was denied entry into the Western zones, he accepted an invitation from East Berlin" (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 1991, 363; *Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 377; *Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 358). Three textbooks provide no information about the years between Brecht's move to the GDR and his death (*Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen* [1990], *Deutsch 12* [2010], *P.A.U.L. D.* [2013]), thus omitting any mention of his time at the Berliner Ensemble, which *Texte, Themen und*

<sup>12</sup> "Went to East Berlin": *Kennwort 11* (314), *Kennwort 13* (361), *Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen* (216); "settled in the GDR": *Deutsch 12* (90), *P.A.U.L. D.* (361); "returned to Germany (East Berlin)": *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* 1999 (57).

<sup>13</sup> Brecht had been under surveillance by the US government for several years at this point due to his status as Enemy Alien and his espousal of communist ideals. When asked if he had been or was a member of the Communist Party, he responded no (neither in the USA nor in Germany). Brecht was criticized for appearing in front of the Committee and left for Europe the day after his testimony. For more information, see Knopf (2006, 55–56).

<sup>14</sup> 1995: *Kennwort 11* and *13* (Bayern), *Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen* (MV, S), 2005: *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* 1999 (MV), 2015: *Deutsch 12* (Bayern), *KombiKOMPAKT N* (MV, S). As with other aspects of biographical text differences, there does not seem to be a strong regional correlation.

*Deutsch 12* does address this issue in a brief introductory text for the poem "Ein neues Haus." It informs students that "Brecht preferred to work in East Berlin. The main reasons for his decision were his desire to contribute to forming a socialist society, and the opportunity for "practical" theater work (*Deutsch 12* 2010, 246).

*Strukturen* (1999) rightfully describes as having “attained global fame,” and which any Brecht expert would view as an important station in his artistic life (*TTS* 1999, 57). The differences in textbooks here cannot clearly be attributed to regional differences or change over time; they instead seem to reflect the central question of how to portray Brecht. Everybody loves him, but not every part of him, and some textbook authors will go to greater lengths than others to downplay the potentially problematic elements of his biography.

Perhaps the most intriguing instances of change over time are found in the three editions of *Blickfeld Deutsch*. Published in 1991, 2003, and 2010 and approved for use in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (2003), Sachsen (2010) or both (1991), the editions present largely identical biographical sketches of Brecht. They are quite long for such texts, reflecting the literary importance placed on Brecht, and they all include acknowledgement of both Brecht’s Marxist view of literature and of his writing/directing in the GDR (Berliner Ensemble, Buckow Elegies). What stands out, however, are the changes made between 1991 and 2003. The 1991 version includes the following:

Here [in East Berlin—*EPS*] he founded his “Berliner Ensemble,” where he developed model productions for his plays. At the same time, Brecht remained an important poet and storyteller (*Kalendergeschichten*, several major novels). In 1954 he published the “Buckower Elegien,” a collection of succinct poems with great austerity of form and deep humanity. The division of Germany also divided Brecht’s literary impact: claimed by the GDR as a “state poet,” he was greeted with mistrust in the West. (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 1991, 363)

The 2003 version of *Blickfeld Deutsch* shortens the excerpt to two sentences: “Here he founded his ‘Berliner Ensemble,’ where he developed model productions for his plays. At the same time, Brecht remained an important poet (*Buckower Elegien*, 1954) and storyteller (*Kalendergeschichten*, several major novels)” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 377). This truncated version notably detracts from the nuance about Brecht’s writing and experiences in the GDR and echoes Brecht’s disappearance from a post-1945 context in state curricula for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen. The 2010 version is identical to 2003, suggesting that the earlier nuance was once again found to be superfluous. All three versions continue to remind readers of “Brecht’s uncontested

position as the most important innovator of theater, as well as poetry and prose” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 1991, 363; *Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 377; *Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 358). Brecht’s creative accomplishments (and challenges) in the GDR are downplayed, but his importance in German literature writ large is claimed in each edition.

### *Brecht, the Buckow Elegies, and the 1953 Uprising*

Brecht’s Buckow Elegies (*Buckower Elegien*) are arguably his writings most overtly associated with the GDR, and they therefore pose similar—potentially even greater—challenges to textbook authors than does Brecht’s biographical information. Much like biographical texts, the portrayal of the Buckow Elegies over time reveals a growing willingness to acknowledge Brecht’s GDR writings in their sociohistorical context. Much more noticeably than with biographical texts, however, the depiction of the poems (and by extent Brecht himself) has become increasingly narrow, uniform, and politicized. These developments are amplified by the expanding role in textbooks of extra-literary elements such as reading questions and informational texts. At times, the GDR context, and the underlying ideological critique of the GDR, overshadows the GDR texts.

In 1952, Bertolt Brecht and his wife Helene Weigel (actress and artistic director of the Berliner Ensemble), purchased a summer house in Buckow, roughly an hour east of Berlin (Knopf 1984). It is this rural setting which gives its name to the collection of poems.<sup>15</sup> Written mostly in the summer of 1953 and often appearing at first glance to be simple nature poems, they actually reflect Brecht’s Marxist understanding that poetry must not be isolated from social reality (Ibid); in the words of *Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen*, the Elegies signify a “new way of writing which is about the

<sup>15</sup>In November 1953, Brecht sent several of these poems to his West German publisher, Peter Suhrkamp. In the letter that accompanied them, Brecht referred to the poems as “Bukowische Elegien”—a tongue-in-cheek reference to the geographic location and to the tradition of “bukolische” (bucolic) poetry with its focus on nature as the antidote to societal problems (Kittstein 2012, 314).

Only *Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen* (1989) and *Texte und Methoden 11* (1992) mention that Buckow is a place; *Texte und Methoden* incorrectly states that Brecht wrote the elegies in “Buckow in Saxon Switzerland” (297) (Buckow is actually in Brandenburg (Märkische Schweiz), not Saxony), while *Deutsche Dichtung* informs students that “after the uprising of 17 June 1953, Brecht retreated to his country residence in Buckow, east of Berlin, which he had bought in 1950 [*sic*]” (706).

reflection of societal conditions from a subjective point of view” (*Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen* 1989, 687). Individual elegies are Brecht’s attempt to come to terms with the continued impact of Germany’s Nazi past, an exploration of his enthusiastic but critical support of the SED, and a first reaction to the political events of June 1953. A few of the works were published before Brecht’s death in the GDR journal *Sinn und Form*, but the collection of 23 poems now known as the *Buckower Elegien* was first published by the West German Insel Verlag in 1964.

1953 was a year of political turmoil in the GDR, and the situation reached its boiling point on 17 June. Due to the political and literary importance of this day’s events for Brecht, and the presumed lack of knowledge on the part of students, several newer textbooks provide brief summaries of the uprising. In contrast to the 1991 and 2003 editions of *Blickfeld Deutsch*, which include no information about the events, the 2010 edition provides the most explanation of all textbooks:

On 17 June 1953 the young GDR experiences its first large shock: a construction worker’s strike in the East Berlin *Stalinallee* mushrooms into a nationwide worker’s uprising. Strikes and demonstrations occur in hundreds of locations. The GDR government is helpless and eventually lets the protest be struck down by Soviet troops.

The causes of the uprising can be traced back to the resolutions of the II. Party Conference in July 1952. There the development of socialism based on the Soviet model was decided upon. The results of this “Sovietization” are a food crisis and a reduction in industrial production. Many citizens react with protests and “Republikflucht” [an SED term for defecting from the GDR—*EPS*]. In addition to this far-reaching economic and political crisis, in May 1953 the SED government issues a law to increase production quotas. This was seen by workers as an additional provocation. (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 412)

The events of 17 June—both the uprising by the workers and its violent quelling by the government(s)—presented a significant challenge to Brecht. As a committed Marxist, he had a complicated relationship with the SED, supporting, but never joining the Party. Brecht addresses the gap between socialist dream and SED reality in several works, leading Kittstein (2012) to describe Brecht’s attitude toward the SED regime as one of “critical loyalty” (298). Brecht found fault in the actions of both workers and the Party, but believed that ultimately both sides were fighting for the same cause.

Brecht expressed his critical loyalty in a letter to head of state Walter Ulbricht in the early hours of the uprising on 17 June 1953. While the letter reiterates Brecht's support for the ideals of the SED, it likewise implies that the Party should enter into discussion "with the masses about the tempo of establishing socialism" and subtly warns of the risks of not doing so (Brecht 1998, 30:178). Several days later, the SED-controlled GDR newspaper *Neues Deutschland* published a one-sentence excerpt from the letter which underscored Brecht's "solidarity with the Socialist Unity Party of Germany" (Ibid). Brecht's criticism was silenced, while his loyalty was highlighted. Notably, only *Kennwort 13* (1994) mentions this important event.<sup>16</sup> Other textbooks shy away from including this letter to Ulbricht, presumably because it would require a more nuanced acknowledgement of Brecht's continuing (critical) loyalty to the SED. While the Buckow Elegies could still be portrayed as a new literary style for Brecht, they would no longer represent a clear political rejection of the SED (and SED socialism) in light of his letter to Ulbricht.

As previously noted, the most basic elements in a textbook's portrayal of an author are whether and where his or her texts are included. Table 3.1 reveals that 1985 has the highest inclusion rate for the Buckow Elegies, but the two textbooks which present the poems—*Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* and the GDR textbook *Literatur 11/12*—do not explicitly situate any of the poems in their specific historical context. *Arbeitsbuch Deutsch*, which includes five poems of the Buckow Elegies in a chapter on "Great German

**Table 3.1** Inclusion of the Buckow Elegies in textbooks

	<i>Unique texts</i>	<i>Total texts</i>	<i># of textbooks</i>	<i>Die Lösung (The Solution)</i>	<i>Der Rauch (Smoke)</i>	<i>Der Radwechsel (Changing the Wheel)</i>
1985	7	10	2 (of 8)	1	2	2
1995	4	5	2 <sup>a</sup> (of 8)	1	2	1
2005	2	3	3 (of 7)	2	0	1
2015	2	3	3 (of 8)	2	1	0

<sup>a</sup>I count *Texte und Methoden 11* and *13* as one book/series

<sup>16</sup>A 1953 timeline entry states that Brecht "forgoes a public protest against the quelling of the uprising of 17 June, but does write a critical letter to Ulbricht, of which only the last sentence is published. It includes Brecht's fundamental "agreement" with the SED leadership. His position is apparently contradictory" (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 209).

Authors of *Our Century*,” does point out that Brecht is represented by “poems of his mid- to late-career” and prints the year 1953 along with the poems (*Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* 1979, 81), while *Literatur 11/12* includes them in the aforementioned chapter on humanism and realism with texts reaching back to the ancient Greeks. As with so many of his other works, the Elegies are being used by these pre-1990 textbooks in both Germanys to situate Brecht within a larger tradition of (German and/or socialist) literature, not to present him specifically as a GDR author.

Textbooks used after reunification position the Buckow Elegies much more overtly in a post-war/GDR context, including them in chapter sections such as “The Post-War Period and GDR” (*Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen* 1989), “Postwar societies in East and West” (*Literatur* 1998) or “Writing Between Partisanship and Distance” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010). The only notable exceptions are *Texte und Methoden 11* (1992), which includes “Der Rauch” (“Smoke”) in a chapter on nature poetry in modern literature, and *Deutschbuch 12* (2010), which includes the same poem in the chapter “Considering Language.” After reunification, textbooks are much more likely to include these poems in their sociohistorical context, a development which echoes the overall portrayal of Brecht and his writings.

When looking at specific elegies and their inclusion rates over time, it becomes apparent that the portrayal of Brecht and his most obviously GDR-related poems is growing more uniform and more politicized. While seven elegies were included in 1985 textbooks, that has fallen to two in 2005 and 2015. The poems that are omitted are generally those which do not (overtly) deal with GDR society and politics, such as “Der Blumengarten” (“The Flower Garden”) or “Heißer Tag” (“Hot Day”). This does not mean that the elegies themselves are decreasingly viewed as exemplary literature, since a slightly higher percentage of post-1990 textbooks include at least one poem as compared to 1985, but that the presentation of Brecht as a post-1945 author is becoming narrower. The three most widely included poems reflect this trend. While “Der Rauch” creates a succinct still life of a house, lake, and smoke from a chimney, “Der Radwechsel” (“Changing the Wheel”) uses the symbolism of a wheel change to portray a sense of impatience with the pace of political



and social change.<sup>17</sup> Both of these poems appear in multiple textbooks, but at a slightly decreasing rate over time.

As one might expect, the only elegy to appear in 1985–2015, as well as to appear more often in 2005 and 2015 than in 1985 or 1995, is “Die Lösung” (“The Solution”), the elegy which most obviously addresses GDR political events. It offers a cynical, tongue-in-cheek answer to dealing with the fallout of the crushed 17 June uprising: rather than expecting the workers to earn back the government’s trust, perhaps the SED should “dissolve the people and elect another” (Willett and Manheim 1976, 440).<sup>18</sup> Readers familiar with the poem may already know how closely the first lines echo actual events. First Secretary of the Writer’s Union, Kurt Barthel, who also wrote under the pen name Kuba, did not himself order the distribution of leaflets in East Berlin, but he did publish a newspaper article in *Neues Deutschland* on 20 June 1953 with the provocative title “Wie ich mich schäme!” (I am ashamed!) In the article, Barthel excoriated the workers who had participated in the uprising, accusing them of letting themselves be used by the West, and reminding them of how much they owed to the SED, the Soviet Army, and the GDR (Barthel 1953). Brecht only slightly blurred the lines between reality and fiction in his poem before turning his attention to the heart of the matter: the dysfunctional, potentially broken relationship between the government and the people.<sup>19</sup> With its provocative message, its dramatic historical genesis, and Brecht’s status as German literary icon, it is understandable that textbooks continue to include “Die Lösung” in their chapters about GDR literature. Indeed, the poem and related extra-literary elements play an important role in Brecht’s depiction as a GDR author.

<sup>17</sup>There is a bit more to “Der Rauch” than meets the eye. According to Schütte, smoke from the chimney was a pre-arranged signal between Brecht and a mistress. As one might expect, this is not mentioned in textbooks (Schütte 2005). In his analysis of “Der Radwechsel,” Kittstein points out that Brecht isn’t necessarily impatient with socialism itself, but with the difficulties of *any* large social change (Kittstein 2012, 320–321). However, the reading of “Der Radwechsel” as a critique of socialist change was common in the GDR and is picked up on by *KombiKOMPAKT 12* in a reading question: “Speculate why this poem by Brecht was always included in West German textbooks, but never in those of the former GDR” (*KombiKOMPAKT 12* 2010, 89).

<sup>18</sup>The entire poem in German can be found in Brecht (1967, 10:1009).

<sup>19</sup>The SED did distribute leaflets a few days after the uprising that included Barthel’s “I am ashamed” quotation. Excerpts from these leaflets were printed in the 30 June 1953 edition of the West German news magazine *Der Spiegel*.

*“Die Lösung” as Text and Context*

It is clear that Brecht’s politics are challenging for textbook authors, and “Die Lösung” provides a convenient opportunity to acknowledge the younger Brecht’s links to the SED, while simultaneously highlighting his rebellion against the Party. *Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen* describes Brecht’s early writings as being “intent on their usefulness for socialism,” but positions the Buckow Elegies as a turning point, a “new way of writing” (*Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen* 1989, 687). While the textbook does not directly say that this new way of writing put Brecht at odds with the SED, it does imply that he was no longer obediently following the Party’s lead. A footnote below “Die Lösung” highlights this, claiming that the Buckow Elegies “reflect Brecht’s critical stance and creative crisis” (Ibid, 706). *Deutsch 12* introduces “Die Lösung” with a paragraph outlining Brecht’s favored status in the GDR (director of the Berliner Ensemble, winner of the National Prize) and his “inconsistent behavior,” but also his “socially critical stance” (*Deutsch 12* 2010, 246). Brecht obviously profited from his proximity to the SED, but *Deutsch 12* presents “Die Lösung” (and the entire collection of elegies) as proof of Brecht’s socially critical stance, highlighting his status of being in the GDR but not fully of the GDR. It is worth noting that *Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen* was used in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and *Deutsch 12* in Bayern, so this depiction of Brecht is not uniquely Western or Eastern German. Instead, it can be viewed as a post-unification attempt to position “Die Lösung”—and Brecht himself—as a break with SED-controlled literary output. Interestingly, only *Kennwort 13* (used in Bayern) points out that Brecht did not actually attempt to publish “Die Lösung”; it was found in his papers after his death. While the decision to keep such a politically inflammatory poem private is completely understandable, it would complicate the portrayal of “Die Lösung” as a (public) literary and political turning point for Brecht. It therefore comes as no surprise that other textbooks choose to omit the details of its delayed publication, instead continuing to present “Die Lösung” as Brecht’s personal declaration of independence from the SED.

While “Die Lösung” is deeply political in both its context and its message, it is also a poem—a literary text. In their reading questions about poetry, textbooks generally ask students to examine elements such as meter, language, or the speaker (*lyrisches Ich*) before shifting attention to historical context. In the case of “Die Lösung,” historical context nearly

completely subsumes the literary text, with questions such as “To which historically important events is the poem responding?” (*Passagen* 2001, 342), or “What stance does the speaker in Brecht’s poem “Die Lösung” take toward the uprising of 17 June?” (*TTS* 1999, 351).<sup>20</sup> While one can rightfully argue that to understand “Die Lösung” a reader must understand its historical context, the poem supposedly is included in textbooks because it is an exemplary *literary* text. *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010) acknowledges this most clearly, asking students to determine the audience for the poem and to compare author intention and language with that of a second text before turning students’ attention to the “general problem facing authors in the GDR” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 413). While a few other textbooks do include literary terms like “*lyrisches Ich*” in their reading questions, they ultimately ask questions along the lines of “What is the *lyrisches Ich* criticizing?,” which immediately shifts attention away from aesthetic elements of the poem itself to larger cultural context and critique. The literary aspect of literary history is overshadowed by political context; Brecht’s GDR writing takes a back seat to GDR events. Placing literary texts in their historical context is a main requirement of *Oberstufe* literature courses, but texts should not disappear within the larger ideological context.

The best way to illustrate how “Die Lösung” reveals the simultaneous growing willingness to position Brecht as a GDR author as well as an increasing concentration on politics is to directly compare two of the newest textbooks—*Blickfeld Deutsch* (Sachsen) and *Deutsch 12* (Bayern), both published in 2010.<sup>21</sup> Their portrayals of “Die Lösung” have many commonalities, but the most intriguing difference is how each textbook positions Brecht within GDR sociopolitical events—in the GDR, or of the GDR. This contrast is first revealed in the section titles in each textbook: “Writing Between Partisanship and Critical Distance—Examining Reactions to Political Demands and Events in GDR Literature” (*Blickfeld Deutsch*) and “Returned After Fifteen Years in Exile—Grappling with Fascism” (*Deutsch 12*). While both textbooks include “Die Lösung” in

<sup>20</sup>The question in *Passagen* is not only for *Die Lösung* but for all texts included in the section “Literature since 1945: Poems—History’s Memory” (*Passagen* does not include reading questions for individual texts).

<sup>21</sup>The webpage for *Blickfeld Deutsch* says that it is approved for use in all German states except Bayern (Westermann Gruppe n.d.). This appears to have changed after 2015, as the textbook approval list for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern for that year does not include *Blickfeld Deutsch*.

larger chapters about GDR literature, the section titles signal contrasting points of view and emphasis. *Blickfeld Deutsch* emphasizes Brecht's role within GDR society, while *Deutsch 12* portrays him as a returned refugee, an outsider looking in.

This difference in portrayal continues in informational texts, pictures, and footnotes included with "Die Lösung." *Blickfeld Deutsch* provides a fairly detailed synopsis of what led up to the events of 17 June 1953 (quoted in its entirety earlier in this chapter)—albeit without any mention of Brecht or "Die Lösung"—while the informational text in *Deutsch 12* elaborates on Brecht's experiences with the cultural politics of the SED after he settled in the GDR. The 1953 uprising is only briefly mentioned, keeping the pre-reading focus on Brecht's complicated relationship with the SED. The most detailed information about the uprising in *Deutsch 12* actually is found in a footnote, which informs students that "Around 17 June 1953 there was a wave of strikes and demonstrations in the GDR (so-called uprising of 17 June)" (*Deutsch 12* 2010, 246). It is worth noting that *Deutsch 12* uses the term "people's uprising (*Volksaufstand*) of 17 June 1953" in the informational text, but in the footnote refers to it as the "so-called" uprising of 17 June. There may not be anything behind this decision, but it is reminiscent of how the FRG referred to many GDR-related terms, especially in the early years, when news outlets frequently referred to the country as the "so-called" GDR or put GDR in quotation marks. Intentional or not, such rhetorical moves can serve to trivialize the events and ideas to which they refer.

Pictures further develop the differing portrayals of 17 June and "Die Lösung." *Blickfeld Deutsch* includes one of the iconic images of young men throwing stones at Russian tanks, highlighting the hope, frustration, and violence of the day, while *Deutsch 12* shows demonstrators marching with a large sign reading "free elections," emphasizing the larger political goals of the uprising, while omitting any mention of the violence that followed (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 413; *Deutsch 12* 2010, 247). Both images are "accurate," but they create very different impressions of events, all before most students even have read "Die Lösung." What impression are students forming of 17 June 1953—a peaceful demonstration for free elections, or a hopeless fight pitting young men with rocks against Russian tanks? How do they connect to Brecht and "Die Lösung"? To a large extent, the answer depends on whether students live in Sachsen or in Bayern.

The most prominent difference between the two textbooks, however, is their selection of texts to pair with “Die Lösung.” In keeping with its thematization of Brecht as a returning exile and how the GDR grappled with its fascist past, *Deutsch 12* includes a 1949 Brecht poem, “Ein neues Haus” (“A New House”). While reflecting on his privileges, the speaker hopes they will not make him blind to the “holes in which so many thousand sit” (*Deutsch 12* 2010, 246). After reading both poems, students are asked to compare them “in historical context,” to explain their “connection to fascism,” and to discuss the “criticism of the speaker (*lyrisches Ich*) that becomes clear in each poem” (Ibid, 247). The concentration here is largely on Brecht’s experiences as a returning exile and his critical loyalty to the ideals of socialism and anti-fascism as espoused by the SED. The events of the uprising are background for the personal journey of a socio-politically critical author. In contrast, *Blickfeld Deutsch* is the only analyzed textbook to include an excerpt from Kurt Barthel’s newspaper essay “Wie ich mich schäme!,” which chastised participants in the uprising as being disloyal to socialism. A brief footnote informs students that Barthel was the First Secretary of the Writer’s Union of the GDR, hopefully priming students to realize that he is being referred to in “Die Lösung.” The pairing of texts by Barthel and Brecht emphasizes the polarized attitudes surrounding the uprising and unmistakably positions Brecht as a critical voice in (and of) the GDR. The differences between *Blickfeld Deutsch* and *Deutsch 12* demonstrate the dissimilar decisions which textbook authors have made about how to best present “Die Lösung” as (GDR) text and context. *Blickfeld Deutsch* deals extensively and critically with events in the GDR, with less attention on Brecht himself, while *Deutsch 12* downplays the events surrounding the uprising to focus on Brecht as a socially critical returned refugee. Ultimately, however, both portrayals are less about “Die Lösung” than about Brecht himself, and both allow textbooks to avoid some of the problematic aspects of his life and writing.

### CONCLUSION

Perhaps the title of this chapter should have been “Everybody Loves Brecht, Just Not Everything about Him.” There is no doubt that Brecht is viewed as an essential element of literature textbooks; his poems, plays, and theoretical writings continue to shape German literature today. On the other hand, Brecht’s politics present uncomfortable challenges for textbooks on both sides of the Berlin Wall: in the GDR because he (at

times) challenged SED policies, and in the FRG because he supported Marxist ideas. While contemporary textbooks are somewhat more willing to acknowledge Brecht's time in the GDR, many of them still go to great lengths to downplay the ideological significance of his works and political beliefs. While most Brecht scholars have come to terms with the "problem" that is Bertolt Brecht, many literature textbooks continue to create a more simplistic, conservative version of the author. As we turn our attention in the next chapter to Johannes R. Becher and Anna Seghers, we will see again how the political beliefs, and resulting literary styles, of GDR authors play a critical role in their textbook legacy.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# Anna Seghers and Johannes R. Becher as GDR Authors

Anna Seghers and Johannes R. Becher, together with Bertolt Brecht, represent the most famous returning socialist exiles who shaped the first generation of GDR literature. All three authors are well-known for their pre-1945 works, and these are widely included in textbooks. Within a GDR context, however, several differences become apparent; whereas Brecht is problematic but still proudly claimed by textbooks, Becher and Seghers are frequently marginalized or omitted altogether. My argument is that societal attitudes about the GDR and SED-controlled cultural politics, even more than questions of literary quality or aesthetics, are at the heart of this contrast. Whereas Brecht maintained a critical distance from the SED and socialist realism, Seghers and Becher publicly allied themselves with the Party, its policies, and its mandated literary style. In contrast to Brecht, who can be portrayed as “in the GDR, but not of the GDR,” Seghers and Becher were definitely active participants in the SED-controlled state. This makes them much more problematic than Brecht for West German and post-unification textbook authors, leading to a critical depiction of Becher as an SED-affiliated author and a near-complete omission of Seghers’ GDR works.

For those readers less familiar with Anna Seghers and Johannes R. Becher, some brief biographical information may be helpful. Both Seghers and Becher were well-known authors before the founding of the

GDR in 1949. Becher (1891–1958) began publishing in 1911 and was active in the Expressionist movement, being described by some textbooks as one of its “leading representatives” (*Kennwort* 13 1994, 359; *Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 411). Anna Seghers (1900–1983) first published in 1924 and is best-known for her two novels written in exile: *Das siebte Kreuz* (*The Seventh Cross*) (1942) and *Transit* (1944). Both authors quite logically are frequently included in pre-1945 chapters on Expressionism (Becher) and exile literature (Seghers). In this context, we see similarities to Bertolt Brecht.

Whereas Brecht supported the ideas of socialism but never joined the SED, Becher and Seghers were closely affiliated with the Party. Both joined the German Communist Party (KPD) in the 1920s and upheld their ideological convictions even after Hitler came to power and the Nazis began persecuting left-wing parties. Seghers, who was Jewish, escaped Germany to France and eventually to Mexico, while Becher found refuge in France and the Soviet Union. After the KPD and the Social Democratic Party were merged in 1946 to form the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the Soviet Occupation Zone, both Becher and Seghers joined the newly formed party (in 1946 and 1947, respectively) (Müller-Enbergs et al. 2010).<sup>1</sup> Becher became the first President of the *Kulturbund* in 1945, and the first Minister of Culture in 1954; the German Institute for Literature in Leipzig (*Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig*)—the only post-secondary institution in the GDR specifically for developing authors—was renamed in his honor in 1959 (Institutsgeschichte n.d.).<sup>2</sup> Two years later, the Johannes R. Becher Medal for “outstanding cultural-political achievements” (Bartel 1979, 196) was created, and the first recipient was Anna Seghers, who had already won the National Prize of the GDR in 1951 (Müller-Enbergs et al. 2010). From 1952–1978, Seghers was the President of the GDR Writers’ Union (*Schriftstellerverband der DDR*), and in 1986,

<sup>1</sup> Becher initially joined the KPD in 1919 but left the Party for several years before re-joining it in 1923. Seghers joined in 1928. After WWII, Seghers returned from Mexico to West Berlin, where she joined the SED and moved to East Berlin in 1950. Becher returned from Moscow to East Berlin in June 1945 (Müller-Enbergs et al. 2010).

<sup>2</sup> The *Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands* (Cultural Association for the Democratic Renewal of Germany) was founded by Becher in August 1945 and was intended to foster nonpartisan and inter-occupational-zone cooperation for intellectuals on the basis of anti-fascism and humanism (Vormweg 2020). The group was later banned in some West German states due to its connection with the SED, and in the GDR, it eventually became known as the *Kulturbund der DDR* (from 1974 to its dissolution in 1990).

the Anna Seghers Scholarship was established (Hilzinger 2000, 198; Anna-Seghers-Gesellschaft 2021).<sup>3</sup> Both authors therefore clearly are affiliated with the politics of the SED and openly supported the GDR establishment in their personal lives and in their writing. This differentiates them from Brecht, who supported the SED simply by being in the GDR, but who retained some level of distance and independence. This disparity results in noticeably different depictions of Becher and Seghers as GDR authors in textbooks than for Brecht.

Beyond the obvious commonalities between Becher and Seghers, however, their portrayal in textbooks reveals significant contrasts. Becher's GDR writings, especially the lyrics for the national anthem, are included in multiple textbooks, whereas Seghers' GDR texts are omitted from all textbooks except *Literatur 11/12* (used in the GDR). For an author who continued to publish until 1980, this is noteworthy. My argument is that post-unification textbooks are willing to identify Becher as a GDR author, but that they do not want to taint Seghers' pre-1945 reputation with texts written in and for the GDR. Both Becher and Seghers are included in informational texts about early GDR literature and cultural politics, but texts *by* Seghers are noticeably absent—in essence silencing her legacy as a GDR writer.

To fully see how Seghers and Becher are treated differently (from each other and from Brecht), four areas need to be considered: curricula, the selection and presentation of texts, the positioning of Becher and Seghers as GDR authors in their biographies, and their inclusion in informational texts about the GDR and socialist realism.

### INCLUSION IN GDR CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOK

Not surprisingly, the GDR curriculum and textbook prominently portray Seghers and Becher as part of the socialist (realist) literary tradition. Both authors appear in at least two of the four thematic units introduced in the

<sup>3</sup>The website of the Anna-Seghers-Gesellschaft notes that “in her will, Anna Seghers specified that royalties from her works should be used to support young authors from the GDR and developing countries. From 1986–1994 the annual award was overseen by the Academy of Arts of the GDR and later by the author's children, Pierre and Ruth Radvanyi.” The scholarship was later renamed the Anna Seghers' Prize and currently is awarded by the Anna-Seghers-Stiftung (Anna-Seghers-Gesellschaft 2021).

curriculum, along with titles of required works.<sup>4</sup> Thematic unit II includes a section specifically on GDR literature, which suggests “poems by Becher” (no titles listed) and requires Anna Seghers’ 1967 novella *Das wirkliche Blau* (*Benito’s Blue*). As with all major texts in the GDR curriculum, teaching suggestions are provided, with topics including “the contrast between rich and poor,” the “power of the people,” and “freeing the self from capitalist dependency” (GDR 1979, 57). The final suggestion emphasizes “the meaning of the narrative works of the author for the development of socialist national literature (*Nationalliteratur*) and for the writing of young authors” (Ibid.). Seghers is overtly positioned as a GDR author here, through thematic focus as well as through text choice. *Das wirkliche Blau* embodies GDR socialist realism, although it was written in the waning days of the style, thus making it a logical choice for inclusion in this curriculum.<sup>5</sup> Becher’s name appears several times in the thematic unit “Humanism and Realism in Classic(al) Literature and Their Meaning for Socialist National Culture,” specifically in the context of socialist ballads. Teaching suggestions for his “Neue deutsche Volkslieder” (New German folk songs) (1950) include “reactivating student knowledge about the life of Johannes R. Becher,” emphasis on his “deep connection to the people,” and discussion of “selected folk songs with regard to their melding of the tradition of revolutionary workers’ songs and the creation of the new attitude toward life” (supposedly) found in the GDR (GDR 1979, 84). Clearly, both Becher and Seghers are claimed here not just as socialist authors, but as GDR authors.

This positioning of Seghers and Becher not just as forerunners of GDR literature but as GDR authors continues in the East German textbook *Literatur 11/12*. Of the 16 texts by Becher in the textbook, 9 of them are post-1949 texts, a record not just for overall inclusion but for post-1949 percentages. Seven Becher texts are included in thematic unit II, which concentrates most explicitly on GDR literature, and six of the seven texts were written and/or published in the 1950s. Seghers is represented by only two texts, but both of them are from the 1960s, including excerpts

<sup>4</sup>Thematic unit II: Socialist Realist Literature as a Co-creator of Socialist Society (Becher, Seghers). III: Bourgeois and Socialist Realist Literature in the Fight Against Imperialism and War and for Social Progress (Becher, Seghers). IV: Humanism and Realism in Classic(al) Literature and Their Meaning for Socialist National Culture (Becher).

Information above is for the 1979 curriculum. The 1988 revisions move Seghers from unit II to IV.

<sup>5</sup>The text was meant to be read in its entirety, so it does not appear in *Literatur 11/12*.

from a speech she gave at the First Annual Conference of the GDR Writers' Union in 1966, titled "Die Aufgaben des Schriftstellers heute" (The duties of the author today). The excerpt extends over nearly five pages, making it one of the longer texts in the entire book. It includes statements such as "The German Democratic Republic stands before a new phase in the development of socialism," plainly signaling Seghers' political viewpoint as well as revealing why the speech is given such prominence (*Literatur 11/12* 1980, 149). None of the texts by Becher or Seghers included in *Literatur 11/12* appear in any analyzed West German or post-1990 textbooks, further emphasizing the extent to which these particular works are associated with the GDR. Johannes R. Becher appears more frequently than Anna Seghers (possibly because he wrote poems instead of novels), but both authors are very deliberately and obviously presented as exemplary socialist authors and as GDR authors in the GDR curriculum and textbook.

#### INCLUSION IN FRG AND POST-UNIFICATION CURRICULA

The literary importance of both Becher and Seghers is established in state curricula, as they are mentioned in 5 (Becher) and 8 (Seghers) of the 13 total curricula. Other than in the GDR curriculum, they are rarely required reading—only the 1992 and 2001 Sachsen curricula require students to read excerpts of Seghers' *Das siebte Kreuz* in a unit about exile literature (Sachsen 1992, 79; Sachsen 2001, 87). It is also worth noting that Becher is never mentioned in Bavarian curricula, but Seghers appears in the 1992 and 2009 versions. The slightly higher inclusion levels for Seghers (particularly in Bayern) likely reflect that she is generally considered the stronger of the two authors, as many literary critics consider Becher's later poems little more than Stalinist literary propaganda. Both authors are viewed as part of the school literary canon, however.

When mentioned in West German and post-1990 curricula, both authors generally appear in the context of Expressionism or exile literature, although there are exceptions. Sometimes this is subtle, such as the brief mention in the 1982 Nordrhein-Westfalen curriculum of the different career paths for contemporaries Johannes R. Becher and Gottfried Benn "after WWII" (NRW 1982, 97) or the recommendation in the 1992 and 2001 Sachsen curricula to read Becher's "poetry in exile and after 1945" (Sachsen 1992, 121; Sachsen 2001, 121). Both Seghers and Becher

are mentioned in the context of immediate post-war literature.<sup>6</sup> Only Anna Seghers, though, is included in a specifically GDR context; as we will later see, this is quite different from actual textbooks—one of the only examples in my analysis of curricula including an author and textbooks not following suit. The earliest example is found in the 1982 Nordrhein-Westfalen curriculum, which suggests including stories by Seghers in a unit on “Developments and Tendencies of Socialist Realism” (NRW 1982, 116). While socialist realism began before the GDR, all of the authors listed here in the curriculum are GDR authors, obviously associating Seghers with the country and its early literature.<sup>7</sup> The most overt positioning of Seghers as a GDR author occurs in the 1991 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern curriculum, where the first semester of grade 12 includes the topic “German-language Literature Challenging Social Reality in the FRG and the GDR until 1989 and the *Wende*” (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 1991, 51). There are two separate lists of suggested authors, with the longer list of GDR authors including Seghers and Brecht, although not Becher—perhaps because Becher never challenged GDR social reality. Overall, both Becher and Seghers are predominantly included in curricula for their pre-1945 roles, but some acknowledgement is made of their post-1945 (and for Seghers even specifically GDR) writings, most commonly in the curricula of former East German states.

### INCLUSION IN TEXTBOOKS: TEXTS BY BECHER AND SEGHERS

The overall inclusion rates for Becher and Seghers, shown in Table 4.1, echo larger inclusion trends for contemporary literature. When the GDR textbook *Literatur 11/12* is omitted for 1985, Becher is represented by two texts, and Seghers only by one. After 1990, inclusion levels rise, with texts by both authors appearing in more than half of the textbooks. Texts by Seghers are found in more textbooks than those by Becher, but the difference is not large. When analyzing text selection and placement for

<sup>6</sup>Curricula which include Seghers and Becher in a post-war context: Seghers—Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 1991, Sachsen 1992, Sachsen 2001. Becher—Sachsen 1992, Sachsen 2001.

<sup>7</sup>Other authors mentioned are Christa Wolf (specifically *Der geteilte Himmel*), Willi Bredel, Günter Kunert, Sarah Kirsch. The overarching topic for the second semester of grade 11 is “The Problem of Realism in Language and Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” (NRW 1982, 115).

**Table 4.1** Inclusion rates for Johannes R. Becher and Anna Seghers

	1985		1995		2005		2015	
	<i>Books</i> (8)	<i>Texts</i>	<i>Books</i> (8)	<i>Texts</i>	<i>Books</i> (7)	<i>Texts</i>	<i>Books</i> (8)	<i>Texts</i>
Becher	3	18* (18)	5	8 (6)	4	8 (8)	5	8 (6)
Seghers	2	3 (3)	7	8 (5)	5	9 (7)	6	6 (2)

Unique texts in parentheses

\*16 of 18 are found in the GDR textbook *Literatur 11/12*

Seghers and Becher specifically in a GDR context, however, the differences become much clearer.

The omission of Anna Seghers as a GDR author is nearly universal in West German and post-1990 textbooks. Instead, Seghers is predominantly represented by excerpts from her two exile novels, *Das siebte Kreuz* and *Transit*, which are each included in eight different textbooks and are the only texts other than her 1946 novella *Das Ende* (*The End*) to appear in more than one textbook. A few textbooks position these excerpts in chapters on early postwar literature, but Seghers' texts never appear in a chapter on GDR literature.<sup>8</sup> Other than the GDR textbook itself, only *Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen* (1990) even includes a post-1949 Seghers text, in a chapter on textual interpretation.

There is one textbook in particular that exemplifies this omission of Seghers' GDR texts in an intriguing way. *Passagen* (2001) includes an entire section on Anna Seghers in its unit on "Central Figures of Modernity." Seghers is presented as a "Central Figure in Dark Times" in three time frames: "excursion back to the fatherland," "exile," and "return to the fatherland GDR."<sup>9</sup> The first two sections include texts by Seghers as well as informational texts about her and the time period. The section covering Seghers in the GDR, however, only includes two texts *about*

<sup>8</sup>The 1991 and 2003 editions of *Blickfeld Deutsch* include excerpts of *Das Ende* in a chapter section titled "'Grief Work' (Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich)—Contending with Fascism." The Mitscherlichs are famous for their 1967 work *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (*The Inability to Mourn. The Basis of Collective Behavior*), which explored the ways in which former Nazi sympathizers—and all of German society—dealt with the(ir) Nazi past.

<sup>9</sup>The phrase "excursion back to the fatherland" (*Ausflug ins Vaterland zurück*) is a play on Segher's 1943 narrative "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" (*The excursion of the dead girls*—published in English translation as "The School Excursion").

Seghers. One is by another GDR author (Christa Wolf), but it is noteworthy that Seghers is not allowed to “speak” for herself in this context, which possibly reflects views about the value of her post-1945 writing. At the end of the chapter, students are assigned to write a “literary biography” and are encouraged to consider thematic contexts for their reports, such as “women’s literature, GDR literature, exile literature, socialist realism” (*Passagen* 2001, 282). Again, Seghers is occasionally presented in a GDR context, but not by means of her own literary works.

In contrast to Anna Seghers, texts by Johannes R. Becher are much more frequently presented in a post-1945 and/or GDR context. This is largely due to a single text, “Auferstanden aus Ruinen” (Arisen from the ruins), which became the national anthem of the GDR in 1949. The text appears in two 1995 textbooks and three 2015 textbooks, but not in any 2005 versions, which is somewhat of an anomaly since 2005 is often a high point for GDR text variety and inclusion. Four of these five textbooks position the text in chapters on post-war literature, and either chapter or section headings establish an early-GDR context. For example, *Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen* (1989) includes “Auferstanden aus Ruinen” in the chapter “German Poetry—Postwar and GDR” under the section heading “Build-up, Demarcation, Agitation.” *Kennwort 13* (1994) includes the poem in the broad chapter “Poetry from the Middle Ages to the Present” under the subheading “Political Poetry—‘Suffering (From) Germany’”; this section includes post-1945 poems from Brecht, Reiner Kunze, and Becher, making it a GDR section in content if not in name. *Kennwort* briefly describes the difference between affirmative and critical political poetry and then somewhat unexpectedly claims that the selected poems “exclusively fall in the critical category” (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 297). Considering that Becher wrote the text at the request of the SED and it was adopted as the national anthem of the GDR, this assertion is rather perplexing. It does, however, reveal the challenge facing textbook authors of how closely to connect GDR authors with the GDR state. In this particular instance, Becher is grouped with authors who were more critical of the system, and therefore more palatable to Western audiences.

Small changes over time in the presentation of “Auferstanden aus Ruinen” reflect both a greater willingness to engage with GDR literature as well as possible glimpses of a more overt critique of GDR politics, and by extension, a critique of Becher himself. Neither textbook from 1995 (*Deutsche Dichtung* and *Kennwort*) uses the original title of the poem, instead only referring to it as the “national anthem of the GDR” —more



a symbol than a literary text. By 2015, all three textbooks (*P.A.U.L. D.; Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW; Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost*) use Becher's title and provide information in introductory texts or reading questions about its role as national anthem.<sup>10</sup> Both editions of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* present Becher's poem in sections on immediate post-war literature and pair it with another poem; reading questions direct students to compare the message, form, and language of the paired poems.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that "Auferstanden aus Ruinen" is being taken seriously in both its aesthetic and historical context. *P.A.U.L. D.* takes a slightly different approach, positioning the poem immediately after an informational text on "The Beginnings of GDR Literature" and asking students "to what extent it fulfills the requirements for artistic production" of socialist realist literature (*P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 390). While the focus on literary text or on political context varies between textbooks, all three of them clearly position Becher as a GDR author and then invite students to think more deeply about Becher's poem and about the GDR and its literature.

While "Auferstanden aus Ruinen" is the most common of Becher's post-1945 poems, it is not the only one included in textbooks. Similarly to the way that some textbooks include Anna Seghers in their chapters about immediate postwar literature and coming to terms with fascism, *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (1999) incorporates two Becher poems into its chapter section "Literature in the German Democratic Republic—Contending with Fascism." The two poems were written before 1949 ("Die Asche brennt auf meiner Brust" [The embers burn on my chest] in 1948 and "Ihr Mütter Deutschlands..." [You mothers of Germany...] in 1946), but the organization of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* separates all

<sup>10</sup>Three of the five textbooks address the fact that the anthem was generally not sung, instead only played instrumentally, after the early 1970s due to its call for a unified Germany. *Deutsche Dichtung* (1989, 697) includes this information in a footnote, while *P.A.U.L. D.* (2013, 391) and *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* (2009, 411) ask students why they think the song was problematic (and therefore not sung, only played). The two versions of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (NRW and Ost) point out that the "GDR state leadership" had commissioned a new national anthem to replace the "disgraced" anthem "Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles" (TTS-NRW 2009, 426; TTS-Ost 2009, 411).

<sup>11</sup>*Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* pairs Becher's text with Günther Eich's "Inventur" (Inventory), while *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* pairs it with Brecht's "Ich habe dies, du hast das." Both editions direct students to compare the political message of poems, while only *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* includes a question specifically about form and language.

1945–1989 German literature into FRG or GDR literature. This is underscored visually in a timeline starting immediately in 1945 with parallel columns for developments in East and West Germany. The brief introductory text before Becher’s poems informs students that “in the Soviet occupation zone and the early GDR, literature was strongly influenced over a long period of time by the returned immigrants (Anna Seghers, Bertolt Brecht, Ludwig Renn, Erich Weiner, Johannes R. Becher, etc). There was no discussion of a ‘Zero Hour,’ instead literature—until far into the 1960s—revolved around contending with fascism” (*TTS* 1999, 341). Becher’s poems are then presented together with Johannes Bobrowski’s 1961 poem “Bericht” (Report) and followed by reading questions directing students to compare the poems’ language, content, etc. The final question asks students to “discuss to what extent the linguistic patterns used by Becher do justice to the topic” (*Ibid.*). Without directly critiquing Becher’s literary ability, *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* is still suggesting to students that it may be inferior to that of Bobrowski, about whom no such question is posed. Becher is included as a post-1945 author, but not as one of the best.

The 1991 and 2003 versions of *Blickfeld Deutsch* are the textbooks which most overtly position Becher as a GDR author. His text “Kantate 1950” (Cantata 1950), which sings the praises of socialism and the Party, appears in the chapter section “Partisanship of Literature” and is preceded by a brief mention of the central role of partisanship (*Parteilichkeit*) in early GDR literature. The poem itself is presented together with excerpts from Brigitte Reimann’s 1961 *Ankunft im Alltag* (Arrival in everyday life) (1991, 2003) and 1974 *Franziska Linkerhand* (2003), along with an informational text about partisanship. Both versions begin with the same information:

In socialist understanding, authors possessed as little freedom and independence as other artists; they were bound to the working class and its Party and adopted their class point-of-view. Authors also had their part to play in reaching the goal set in Article 1 of the GDR constitution of “realizing socialism under the leadership of the working class and its Marxist-Leninist Party.”

This built upon the premise that art could influence the formation of a socialist value system in individuals as well as the development of socialist behavior. (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 1991, 385; *Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 411)

At this point, the 2003 version ends, while the 1991 version continues:

If authors wanted to live up to the expectations of their awareness-raising and educative society, they naturally had to identify with the politics of the state and Party and actively lobby for their goals. Authors' work had to serve "the moral development of man in the spirit of socialism." Their partisanship influenced the selection of topics, the portrayal and assessment of characters, the configuration of conflicts and the offered solutions. The central goals were: stimulating a love of work, portraying outstanding accomplishments as exemplary, and inspiring "enthusiasm for groundbreaking acts of production." (Ibid.)<sup>12</sup>

As with other examples from *Blickfeld Deutsch*, we see here that the 1991 version provides students with a more nuanced explanation (and hopefully understanding) of how literature was actually viewed by socialist policy-makers in the GDR. By 2003, students are presented with a much briefer, rather superficial explanation that largely seems designed to present early GDR literature as mere propaganda before turning students' attention to "better" (later) works. While much early GDR literature is tiresomely partisan, students need to understand why it was written that way: the goals for literature in the 1950s GDR were strikingly different from those in the 1950s FRG or current-day Germany. In the 1991 and 2003 editions of *Blickfeld Deutsch*, however, Becher is unmistakably affiliated with partisan socialist realist literature of the early GDR.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, while both Anna Seghers and Johannes R. Becher are associated with the GDR, they are differently represented via their texts as GDR authors. Other than in the GDR textbook *Literatur 11/12*, Seghers has essentially been silenced in this context. Becher is more prominently positioned as an early GDR author, largely through "Auferstanden aus Ruinen" and "Kantate 1950." Across the board—covertly or overtly—Becher's GDR writings are presented as being in lockstep with Party policy and inferior to those of more critical GDR authors. This attitude toward the literary works of SED-loyal authors is echoed in some biographical texts.

<sup>12</sup>The quotations within the informational text are from Mehnert (1968). Source information is included at the end of the paragraph in the textbook.

<sup>13</sup>The 2010 edition of *Blickfeld Deutsch* does not include an informational text on partisanship, instead providing a very brief overview of the concept in a general informational text about early GDR literature. The 2010 edition does not include any texts by Becher in its GDR chapter.

## BECHER AND SEGHERS IN BIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS

Biographical texts once again confirm that Becher and Seghers are presented as important authors in textbooks. While not appearing as often as Brecht, there are five biographical texts about Seghers and four about Becher. These appear in textbooks used in 1995–2015 (1985 textbooks do not include biographical texts at all), underscoring the long-term noteworthiness of Becher and Seghers. Their importance in early GDR literature is widely acknowledged, with most books striving for evenhandedness, while some also use biographical texts as a means of ideological critique.

In contrast to Brecht, whose 1948 move to the GDR receives varying degrees of acknowledgement in biographical texts, Becher and Seghers are consistently presented as “returning” to East Berlin and/or the GDR.<sup>14</sup> The few biographical texts that only mention a return to Germany still make it clear that the authors lived in the GDR, for example, the note in *P.A.U.L. D.* that Johannes R. Becher “returned to Germany after the war, and after the founding of the GDR, he was a member of the *Volkskammer*, the GDR parliament” (*P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 391). Only one textbook, *Kennwort 13*, does not include any mention of the GDR; its very brief biographical note about Becher exclusively includes pre-WWII information even though Becher’s 1949 poem “Auferstanden aus Ruinen” is included in the book. This is in contrast to its portrayal of Anna Seghers, whose residency in East Berlin and whose role as President of the Writers’ Union of the GDR are mentioned (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 363). Overall, however, both Seghers and Becher are portrayed in biographical texts as living and working in the GDR.

This consistency in portrayal carries through to the topic of author politics, in that Becher and Seghers’ membership in the German Communist Party (KPD) is mentioned in books from 1995–2015 and used in all four federal states analyzed. Five of the nine total biographies directly mention KPD membership, with three of them including the year joined and two implying the general time frame of joining by its placement in the chronologically organized text.<sup>15</sup> *Kennwort* omits mention of the

<sup>14</sup> Several textbooks use the phrase “returned to”: *Blickfeld Deutsch* (1991, 374—Seghers); *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2003, 411—Becher; 393—Seghers); *Literatur* (1998, 383—Seghers); *Deutsch 12* (2010, 155—Seghers).

<sup>15</sup> Direct mention including year: *Blickfeld Deutsch* (1991, 374—Seghers); *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2003, 411—Becher; 393—Seghers). Mentioned without year: *Deutsch 12* (2010, 155—Seghers), *PAUL D* (2013, 391—Becher).

KPD, simply describing Anna Seghers as a “socialist author” (Ibid.). A noteworthy anomaly is found in *Literatur* (1998), the only post-unification textbook from the former GDR publisher Volk und Wissen. It includes quite detailed, albeit telegram-style, biographical texts about both Becher and Seghers, but neither of them directly mentions membership in the KPD or SED. Both biographies do include subtle hints (such as Becher’s exile in Moscow during WWII) and not-so-subtle reminders (Becher’s role as Minister of Culture of the GDR), but some of these are only clear to readers with a fair amount of background knowledge. For example, the brief note of Anna Seghers’ “return to East Berlin” followed by the cryptic “1952/78 Präs d. SV” [Präsidentin des Schriftstellerverbandes—president of the Writers’ Union] without using full words or the addition “of the GDR” could easily confuse students (*Literatur* 1998, 383). It is as if *Literatur* assumes that its readers already know enough about the GDR to draw conclusions (that Seghers and Becher were members of the SED, if not the KPD) that other textbooks clearly spell out. There is some rationale for this, since the textbook was approved for use in Sachsen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, but it was published nearly a decade after German reunification. Students may not have been as familiar with GDR institutions and history as textbook authors assumed.

The biographical texts in the 1991 and 2003 editions of *Blickfeld Deutsch* warrant a closer look for their decision to blend biographical information with ideological critique clothed in literary criticism. The 1991 bio of Anna Seghers is quite impartial, providing a few important dates and a brief summary of her best-known works. Even the mention of her post-1949 novels, viewed by some literary critics as her weakest due to their adherence to the tenets of socialist realism, is diplomatic: “Both post-war novels *Die Entscheidung* (1959) and *Das Vertrauen* (1968) are attempts to take stock of an era” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 1991, 374).<sup>16</sup> The 2003 bio is largely identical, but it echoes the more overt concentration on GDR cultural politics found throughout this newer version of the

<sup>16</sup>Readers familiar with contemporary German literature and literary criticism will not be surprised that Marcel Reich-Ranicki was very critical of many of Seghers’ GDR novels. After acknowledging his admiration for Seghers’ talent, he described her work *Die Entscheidung* (The decision) as a “grievous blow” (*schwerer Schlag*) full of “childish clichés about life on either side of the Elbe that one usually finds in the works of the most questionable GDR authors” (Reich-Ranicki 1967, 178–179). Reich-Ranicki’s opinions strongly influenced the West German literary world, and likely contributed to the dismissive views of socialist realist literature.

textbook. Along with the note that Anna Seghers “returned to East Berlin in 1947” and “was the President of the Writers’ Union from 1952 to 1978” (found verbatim in the 1991 version) is the additional phrase “was a recipient of the Stalin Peace Prize and understood herself as a mouth-piece of the proletariat” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 393). Here we see a much clearer association of Seghers with the cultural and political elite of the GDR than in the earlier edition. Similarly, Johannes R. Becher goes from having no biographical text in the 1991 *Blickfeld Deutsch* to being viewed as “a leading representative of Expressionism” in 2003, emphasizing Becher’s pre-WWII literary status (*Ibid.*, 411). Along with a few typical notes about Becher’s actual biography, the text ends with the following: “In emigration and after 1945 his manner of representation changed to conventional popularity and folksiness (*Volkstümlichkeit*), often banal didacticism and embarrassing political functional poetry (*Zweckdichtung*), for example in the anthems to Stalin” (*Ibid.*). Two things are worth noting here: the blatant devaluation of Becher’s work (which, although many literary critics would agree is accurate, seems somewhat misplaced in a “biographical text”), and the differing levels of criticism doled out to Becher and Seghers. Whether subtly or overtly, however, the message in *Blickfeld Deutsch* is that the GDR writings of these two authors are inferior to their pre-GDR works. While textbooks might consider this type of critique to be based on consensus, it still is largely the consensus of scholars and critics from outside the GDR, a consensus often reached within the context of German division and the Cold War, and therefore not void of political and ideological antagonism.

#### BECHER AND SEGHERS IN INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

In addition to literary texts by Seghers and Becher, informational texts about GDR literature and cultural politics serve as a means of linking these authors to the GDR. By 1995, Seghers and Becher are mentioned in post-1945 informational texts in roughly one-third to one-half of all textbooks. Especially for Seghers, who has essentially none of her GDR texts included, these informational texts much more obviously situate her as a GDR author. While there are many intriguing elements of the informational texts, two topics come to the forefront in connection with Becher and Seghers: the importance of returning exile authors in the early GDR, and the close association of literature with SED politics.

As early as *Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen* (1989), informational texts establish the importance of returning exile authors in the GDR, stating that the “goal of the cultural politics of the Soviet Occupied Zone after 1945 is, specifically, to naturalize (*einbürgern*) the elite of anti-fascist exile literature” (*Deutsche Dichtung* 1989, 687). While *Deutsche Dichtung* does not specifically mention Becher or Seghers in this context, other textbooks, such as the 1999 edition of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen*, emphasize the “long-lasting” impact of returning emigrants such as “Anna Seghers, Bertolt Brecht, [...] and Johannes R. Becher” (*TTS* 1999, 340). Still other textbooks mention the “great recognition” (*Deutsch 12* 2010, 244) or the “greatest esteem” (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 414; *TTS-NRW* 2009, 436) that these authors enjoyed in the GDR, often in contrast to the reception of returning exile authors in the West. Informational texts also make clear that authors such as Seghers and Becher chose to settle in the GDR because it matched their “anti-fascist self-understanding” (*P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 415). Thus, although there are no GDR texts by Seghers in these chapters, both she and Becher are strongly associated with the positive, anti-fascist aspects of early Soviet Occupation Zone and GDR literature through these informational texts.

Informational texts likewise reveal the different approaches to emphasizing an author’s writing or their politics, especially for Becher. *Texte und Methoden 13* includes a multipage text about “essential features of the era,” which explains the cultural politics of the Soviet Occupation Zone and early GDR. Becher is presented here in the context of the “anti-fascist democratic transition period” in the Soviet Occupation Zone, largely in his role as the first president of the nonpartisan *Kulturbund*, and the entry includes his quotation from a 1947 pan-German writers’ conference in Berlin: “We have experienced literature being called to submit itself to political needs, to become a sort of showy arts-and-crafts façade of the government. Politics consumes literature if literature does not in its own unique and independent way become political” (*Texte und Methoden 13* 1994, 225). Becher is obviously referring to the way in which National Socialism manipulated literature, but based upon his later enthusiastic support of SED demands for adherence to socialist realism, one wonders whether Becher viewed his own post-1945 writing as “political” or a “showy façade.” *Texte und Methoden* does not include any information about Becher’s later loyalty to the SED regime and its demands on literature, neither by means of informational texts nor Becher’s partisan poems. Instead, it presents only a brief snapshot of his immediate post-war

political views. Other textbooks make note of these developments, such as *Deutsche Dichtung*, which mentions the “demanded functionalism of literature” in the GDR and Becher’s resulting “mealy-mouthed poems of praise for Lenin, Stalin and Ulbricht,” combining information about Becher’s writing and politics with critique of its own (*Deutsche Dichtung* 1989, 687). The intertwining of literature and politics ran deep for Becher, but textbooks make varying choices about whether and how to acknowledge that.

*Kennwort 13*, in its 1945–1989 timeline, provides the most detailed information about Becher and his role in GDR cultural politics. Like several other textbooks, it mentions Becher’s role as president of the *Kulturbund*, acknowledging that the “membership of authors with bourgeois and non-socialist backgrounds is intended to emphasize the nonpartisan and anti-fascist democratic character” of the group (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 209). By 1950, the situation in the GDR had changed, and “the Soviet model becomes binding for GDR cultural politics.” Becher is mentioned here for his “Kantate 1950,” which he “writes with composer Hanns Eisler for the Party Congress, and whose refrain is ‘All power to you, the victory is yours, Party’” (Ibid., 210). This emphasis on Becher’s very public devotion to the SED continues in the entry for 1953, which states that Becher and other authors “write hymns to the dead Stalin” after Stalin’s death in March of that year. This devotion was rewarded in 1954, when Becher was “called to the head of the newly established Ministry of Culture” (Ibid.). The entry continues as follows:

Party functionaries lead a campaign against authors accused of too little interaction with the working world of the GDR. According to the will of the SED, workers should be encouraged to write novels and poems; authors are expected to go into factories to artistically design the socialist day-to-day. For this reason, the Leipzig “Institute for Literature” is founded. (Ibid.)

While Becher is only mentioned by name early in the entry, it is logical to assume that he can be considered one of the “Party functionaries” who supported the direction of early GDR socialist realism. His role as a member of the SED establishment is clear.

The German Institute for Literature in Leipzig, which was renamed in Becher’s honor after his death in 1958, is yet another example of the dilemma apparent in many textbooks when dealing with the GDR. *Kennwort 13* uses quotation marks around the title, reminiscent of what the West



German conservative press did in the early days of the “GDR.” The impression created is one of reluctance and skepticism, even irony, a sense that textbook authors don’t really agree with the term and use it only because others (here the SED/GDR) did.<sup>17</sup> This reluctance to name is not only found in 1980s and 1990s textbooks, however. *P.A.U.L. D.* openly avoids using the name *Johannes R. Becher Literaturinstitut*. Becher’s biographical entry does acknowledge that “a literary institute was also named after him,” but at least two other GDR authors (Sarah Kirsch and Helga Novak) are simply said to have “studied at a literary institute” (*P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 391, 393–394).<sup>18</sup> This does not seem to arise from a particular reluctance to associate Becher with the GDR and the SED, but rather a reluctance to associate other, more critical, GDR authors with what was very much a state institution.

In contrast to Becher, Anna Seghers essentially disappears from informational texts about the GDR after her inclusion in lists of returning exile authors. Only *Kennwort 13* includes her, in its 1978 timeline entry stating that Hermann Kant replaced her as president of the Writers’ Union, noting that “Kant embodies the collaboration of SED-state and literature,” implying that Seghers didn’t, or at least not to the same extent or not any longer (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 212). While Seghers appears more often than Becher in curricular lists of recommended GDR authors/texts, she is largely absent from informational texts about all but the earliest GDR literature, and in all but the earliest textbooks. In biographical texts, Seghers’ presence in the GDR cannot easily be ignored, but her exclusion from informational texts somehow removes her from the GDR context, despite her decades in the GDR (far longer than Becher or Brecht). Like Brecht, Seghers’ literary importance never is questioned; her affiliation with the GDR is regularly downplayed, as the example of Becher makes clear that being *of* the GDR is almost synonymous with being an author of lesser caliber. Ignoring Seghers’ connection to the GDR can be seen as an attempt to save her literary reputation.

<sup>17</sup> *Kennwort* makes repeated use of quotation marks around terms for events and literary styles (i.e., “Prague Spring”, “New Subjectivity”); however, they appear less often in informational texts about FRG literature and politics.

<sup>18</sup> As previously mentioned, the Johannes R. Becher Institute for Literature was the only such institute in the GDR. *P.A.U.L. D.* uses the official name (*Deutsches Literaturinstitut in Leipzig*) when referring to authors who studied there after 1990, such as Simone Hirth (now Simone Seidl) (*P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 409).

## THE SHADOW OF SOCIALIST REALISM

A discussion of the role of Becher and Seghers within GDR literature is not complete without considering socialist realism. Although the literary style of socialist realism originated in the early twentieth century, it is strongly associated with GDR literature, especially of the 1940s and 1950s. Rooted in the conviction that literature can and should be used to influence individual and societal attitudes, socialist realism unabashedly marries aesthetics and ideology, creativity and politics. When combined with the heavy-handed cultural politics of the SED, it is unsurprising that socialist realism is viewed by many literary scholars and textbook authors as little more than cookie-cutter propaganda stories for an oppressive regime. Because textbooks for the *Oberstufe* are tasked with providing an overview of German literary history, most of them do include at least some discussion and examples of socialist realism. But how is socialist realism contextualized and portrayed? And most importantly, are Becher and Seghers acknowledged as adoptees of this oft-maligned literary style? The answer, as with so many aspects of the GDR in literature textbooks, is: it depends.

At the heart of socialist realism is a Marxist understanding of the role of art and literature, which scholars generally trace back to Lenin's 1905 essay "Party Organization and Party Literature" (Jakobi 2020, 236). Thus, it is noteworthy that only *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (1990) provides students with detailed information about this important concept, stating that "an overview of literary development in the GDR must begin with a short note about the Marxist understanding of art" (TTS 1990, 263).<sup>19</sup> According to the textbook, Marxism posits that:

All intellectual products are part of the ideological superstructure which rises above the material base of the relations of production. They are dependent upon the base, but also impact it in a dialectical process. No work of art can be seen in isolation, as bourgeois aesthetics tends to do, but instead is always a mirror of the context in which it was produced; it therefore—whether intended by the author or not—belongs to a class and a class-specific consciousness. (Ibid.)

<sup>19</sup>The 1991 and 2003 versions of *Blickfeld Deutsch* do briefly mention Marxist literary theory and Lenin's essay, but only to establish the role of partisanship, which "had been viewed as one of the most important criteria of Marxist literary theory since Lenin's 1905 essay 'Party Organization and Party Literature'" (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 1991, 385; *Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 411).

While other textbooks mention that literature was viewed as an “instrument in the building up of socialism” (*Deutsche Dichtung* 1989, 687), none of them provide students with information similar to *Texte, Themen und Strukturen*. Without knowing how GDR leaders and authors—including Becher and Seghers—understood the ideological role of literature, it is difficult for students to view early GDR texts other than through their twenty-first-century “bourgeois” perspective.

While not explaining the ideological roots of socialist realism, nearly a dozen textbooks inform students about its defining principles, such as authenticity, conventional popularity and folksiness, portrayal of the typical, social optimism, a positive, proletarian hero, and partisanship.<sup>20</sup> Informational texts in these textbooks provide a reasonable description of the ideological project of socialist realism in the GDR, as well as how the SED (ab)used its power to control authors and literary publications. On the other end of the spectrum, some textbooks plainly avoid using the term socialist realism, instead only referring to early GDR literature as *Aufbauliteratur* (*Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen, Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen*), while others use the term “so-called’ socialist realism” (*P.A.U.L. D.*).<sup>21</sup> The most current editions of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* echo regional differences in attitudes, with the edition for Eastern Germany mentioning “guiding principles of socialist realism” (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 414) while the edition for Nordrhein-Westfalen refers to “guiding principles of this proscribed realism” (*TTS-NRW* 2009, 437). Simply replacing “socialist” with “proscribed” signals to students in Nordrhein-Westfalen that socialist realist works should be viewed as propaganda rather than as literature, as inferior to Western German (or even to later GDR) texts.

<sup>20</sup>Textbooks which mention at least two of the defining principles of socialist realism in informational texts: *Blickfeld Deutsch* (1991, 385–386), *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2003, 411–413), *Kennwort 13* (1994, 210), *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (1990, 263), *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (1999, 326), *Deutsch 12* (2010, 250), *KombiKompakt 12* (2010, 90), *P.A.U.L. D.* (2013, 390), *Texte, Themen und Strukturen -Ost* (2009, 414), *Texte, Themen und Strukturen -NRW* (2009, 436).

<sup>21</sup>The informational text about early GDR literature in *Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen* goes so far as to claim that literature produced for the Bitterfelder Weg campaign can only be viewed as “ideologically conform texts, not literature. Literature developed outside of the Party doctrine or in covert contention with it” (*Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen* 2002, 249). Such sweeping claims about GDR literature discourage thoughtful analysis.

Seghers and Becher are by no means ignored in informational texts about socialist realism, but as previously noted, they are often presented in connection with one of the most palatable aspects of the style—its emphasis on anti-fascism and consequently its attractiveness to many returning exiles, including Bertolt Brecht. All editions in the three generations of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* mention Becher and/or Seghers together with Brecht as important figures in early GDR literature.<sup>22</sup> The 1990 edition reminds students that 1945–1949 was viewed by the GDR as a time of “anti-fascist democratic upheaval” (*TTS* 1990, 236), the 1999 edition defines a main theme of the literature of this time period as “grappling with fascism” (*TTS* 1999, 325), and the 2009 editions both list Becher, Seghers, and Brecht as “exile authors closely affiliated with Marxism” (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 414; *TTS-NRW* 2009, 436). Not all textbooks which associate Becher, Seghers, and Brecht with early GDR literature clearly label it as socialist realist literature, but the connection is there to be made. Even in this context, however, some textbooks set Brecht apart from Becher and Seghers. *Kennwort 13* points out that “Brecht pushed back against socialist realism with the words ‘only boots can be made to measure’” immediately after informing students that “Johannes R. Becher and other authors wrote hymns to the dead Stalin” and “Becher became President of the Academy of Arts” (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 210). While all three authors are associated with anti-fascist literature, only Becher is presented as an adherent to socialist realism; Brecht challenges it, and Seghers is not specifically mentioned. This echoes observations previously made about Becher, Seghers, and Brecht and their portrayal as socialist authors.

With obvious exception of the GDR textbook *Literatur 11/12*, the few textbooks which connect Anna Seghers with socialist realism at all do so in a way which reveals their mixed feelings about associating her too closely with the GDR.<sup>23</sup> Two early textbooks, *Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* (1979) and *Arbeit mit Texten* (1993), both edited by Robert Ulshöfer, include excerpts of Seghers’ 1942 novel *Das siebte Kreuz*. *Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* includes the text in a chapter about the “Breadth and Variety of Realism,”

<sup>22</sup> Other textbooks, such as *Deutsch 12* and *KombiKompakt N*, mention the important role of returning exiles during this period, but they do not include names of specific authors.

<sup>23</sup> Literary scholars are not in complete agreement about Seghers as a socialist realist author either. Carsten Jakobi describes Seghers’ “relationship to socialist realism as quite ambivalent” and argues that she cannot be viewed as an “outstanding representative” of the style, although “she was discredited [as such] in the FRG, especially during the Cold War” (Jakobi 2020, 235).

pairing it with Brecht's essay "Über sozialistischen Realismus." The chapter introduction informs students that Socialist realism was "declared the only valid artistic and literary style at the first Soviet Writers Congress in 1934" (*Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* 1979, 308). The style was meant to "replace critical realism, because the new social order gave no more cause for criticism"; the resulting "wide debate, in which Brecht participated" is noted as well (Ibid.). While it is easy to overlook, Ulshöfer's use of "socialist" vs. "Socialist" realism (which I replicate here) appears to be a deliberate choice to differentiate between a broader socialist realist movement and one controlled more aggressively by political parties, including—eventually—the SED. After students have read Brecht's essay and the excerpt from *Das siebte Kreuz*, they are asked the following question: "Is Brecht's perception of 'Socialist realism' fulfilled in Seghers' writings, or even in his own? Which authors of the nineteenth and early twentieth century can be viewed as forerunners of Socialist realism?" (Ibid., 309). The connection of Seghers (and Brecht) to Socialist realism is portrayed as tenuous and questionable.

By 1993, Ulshöfer more openly connects Seghers to Socialist realism and the GDR. In *Arbeit mit Texten*, he includes an excerpt of *Das siebte Kreuz* as an example of exile literature and notes that the novel "serves as a standard work of Socialist realism; its author was a figurehead and protagonist of GDR literature until her death" (*Arbeit mit Texten* 1993, 338). This initial affiliation of Seghers with Socialist realism is then called into question by a quote from Brecht, this time his claim that "a work that is categorized as Socialist realism must be 'socialist' and 'realistic,' the 'relationships between people' represented in ways that 'strengthen the socialist impulse'" (Ibid.). As in the earlier textbook, students are asked whether Seghers' novel fulfills Brecht's description—once again questioning her connection to Socialist realism. It is as if Ulshöfer feels compelled to acknowledge that the GDR enthusiastically claimed Seghers and *Das siebte Kreuz* as belonging to Socialist realism, but does not want to let that claim go unchallenged.

This balancing act is echoed in the final textbook which associates Seghers with socialist realism, *Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen* (1990). The text is a 1957 letter from Seghers "in response to questions from a student collective at the *Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultät Leipzig*" (*Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen* 1990, 56) in which Seghers challenges their strict socialist realist approach to interpreting her 1941 story "Das Obdach" (Shelter); the

letter is preceded by the story in its entirety.<sup>24</sup> In her letter, Seghers echoes several of the socialist realist-inspired phrases used by the students, such as “change of ideological awareness” (Ibid., 57). She praises them for their close analysis, but urges them to move beyond terminology and “either-or” thinking, and reminds them that in 1941 she “knew absolutely nothing about socialist realism” (Ibid., 56). Rather than directly address socialist realism, however, the textbook merely encourages present-day students to use the letter as a vehicle to “deepen their analysis” of “Das Obdach” (Ibid.). It is a puzzling choice by the textbook authors to include a letter so defined by its GDR context and response to socialist realist theory in the analysis of a text about WWII Paris and then to ask students to acknowledge one historical context (WWII Paris) while so pointedly ignoring the other (GDR and socialist realism). While students in early post-unification Germany may not have been aware of the rhetorical moves on the part of *Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen*, the textbook simultaneously associates Seghers with socialist realism and separates her from it.

Viewed as a group, textbooks display a marked reticence to link Seghers to socialist realism in the GDR. Her earlier works are occasionally categorized as part of a global socialist realist movement, and Seghers herself is mentioned as one of the returned exiles so important in the nascent GDR state, but the bulk of her post-1949 life and work is omitted from all but a few textbooks. These three textbooks were also published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, suggesting that the impulse to protect Seghers’ reputation from being “tainted” by a connection to socialist realism has become stronger over time. Very few students after 1995 will have encountered Seghers as a socialist realist writer in a GDR context.

## CONCLUSION

For these two representatives of the earliest generation of GDR authors—Johannes R. Becher and Anna Seghers—we see some commonalities with the depiction of Bertolt Brecht: claimed by both the GDR and the FRG as part of the literary canon, but through very different lenses. The GDR

<sup>24</sup> *Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultäten* (Workers and Farmers Schools) were designed to prepare (the children of) workers and farmers for post-secondary studies. Especially in the early years of the GDR, much emphasis was placed on providing these groups with opportunities for further education and career training. No explanation of the term is provided in the textbook.

curriculum and textbook undeniably situate both Becher and Seghers (particularly Becher) as GDR authors, while FRG and post-unification curricula and textbooks reveal an underlying tension about the GDR connection. Although several curricula include both Seghers and Becher as suggested reading for GDR literature, textbooks show a decided reticence to depict Seghers as a GDR author. While Seghers' texts are completely missing from chapters on GDR literature, Becher's texts, especially the lyrics of the GDR national anthem, are regularly included. Biographical and informational texts do establish a GDR context for both Seghers and Becher, but once again the association is much more tenuous for Seghers than for Becher.

As a twentieth-century German author considered by most to be "too big to fail," Seghers is a striking example of Western German attitudes toward the GDR and SED-mandated socialist realist literature. Textbooks gladly include excerpts of her bestselling works written in exile (and in the socialist realist style), but they shy away from any texts written during her more than 30-year career in the GDR. It is impossible to know whether individual textbook authors based these decisions on actual literary "value" or on long-held, perhaps subconscious, attitudes toward the (early literature of the) GDR. Regardless of motivation, the predominantly Western German-controlled textbook industry has created a very sanitized legacy for the socialist writer Anna Seghers.

In contrast to Seghers, Johannes R. Becher becomes a convenient scapegoat to be associated with early GDR literature. His odes to Stalin, the SED, and the GDR are included not simply as literary texts, but as cautionary examples of blindly enthusiastic political beliefs. They are presented as the nadir of GDR literature, to be surpassed in a teleological depiction of literary history by the more critical voices of subsequent generations, or of contemporaries such as Bertolt Brecht.

The case studies of Seghers and Becher reveal the limited options granted to early GDR authors by textbooks, particularly since reunification. Seghers (like Brecht) is viewed as an important author whose GDR pedigree must be carefully finessed or even omitted, while Becher's GDR texts are presented as literary and ideological admonitions against the SED and the early GDR. As is so often the case, the actual focus is less on literary text than on ideological critique of historical context.

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## Reading (About) Wolf Biermann

Wolf Biermann's life and writings—and their portrayal in literature textbooks—are the embodiment of the phrase “everything is political.” His poems and song lyrics are recognized for their literary value as well as for their political messages, and his 1976 expatriation from the GDR is intimately connected with the history of cultural politics in the SED-led country. Biermann therefore poses a unique challenge for literature textbooks against the backdrop of the (literary) text—(historical) context spectrum. In this chapter, I examine the central tension in the depiction of Biermann in textbooks: whether to focus on texts *by* Biermann or on information *about* him. Depending on the textbook, Biermann is presented as an author/songwriter, a cultural dissident, a victim of politics, or a combination of all three. While some regional differences are apparent, the clearest development is a growing instrumentalization of Biermann over time. His texts have become firmly established as part of the textbook canon, but for some textbooks, Biermann's texts predominantly appear to be a convenient way to present the oppressive nature of SED cultural politics. Other textbooks omit Biermann's writings entirely, instead using Biermann and his expatriation as a symbolic shorthand for the protest and oppression which followed his expulsion from the GDR. Biermann is present in textbooks, but he is not always allowed to “speak” for himself.

Because certain aspects of Biermann's biography play such a central role in his portrayal in textbooks, a brief summary is helpful here.<sup>1</sup> Karl-Wolf Biermann was born in Hamburg in 1936 to committed Communist parents. His Jewish father actively resisted the Nazis and was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943 (*KombiKOMPAKT 12* 2010, 98).<sup>2</sup> Emma Biermann and her son Wolf continued their support for the German Communist Party (KPD), with Wolf joining the West German branch of the Young Pioneers and eventually moving to the GDR in 1953 to attend boarding school in the socialist state (Biermann 2017, 60).<sup>3</sup> During his university studies he became involved in the East Berlin theater scene and began writing songs and poems (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 52; *KombiKOMPAKT 12* 2010, 98). Much like Brecht, Biermann's vocal and uncompromising support of communist ideals often clashed with the real existing socialism of the SED. As early as 1963, the Party banned several Biermann performances, and his application for permanent SED membership was rejected (Biermann 2017, 112–13). From 1965 on, he was permanently banned from performing or publishing in the GDR (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 52; *KombiKOMPAKT 12* 2010, 98; *P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 395). Biermann's growing popularity among socialists in West Germany produced an even larger audience for his songs criticizing the shortcomings and hypocrisy of the SED. In 1976, the SED designed a plan to rid themselves of Biermann, allowing him to leave the GDR for a concert tour in West Germany and then officially expatriating him.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Five textbooks—*Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen* (1990), *Literatur* (1998), *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010), *KombiKompakt 12* (2010), and *P.A.U.L. D.* (2013)—include biographical texts about Biermann. These range from a few brief phrases (*Literatur*) to several paragraphs (*P.A.U.L. D.*). All information in this paragraph can be found in Biermann's 2017 autobiography *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten*. I have included citations from textbooks at times.

<sup>2</sup>*KombiKOMPAKT 12* (2010) mistakenly says 1942 instead of 1943. *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010) mentions that Biermann's father was Jewish, but says nothing about his Communist beliefs.

<sup>3</sup>The KPD and the SED were closely linked, and Young Pioneer groups existed in both East and West Germany. *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010), *KombiKompakt 12* (2010), and *P.A.U.L. D.* (2013) mention Biermann's move to the GDR, but not the boarding school.

<sup>4</sup>All biographical texts except the one in *Literatur* acknowledge Biermann's expatriation, although *KombiKompakt 12* (2010) and *Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen* (1990) do not mention the concert tour itself. *Literatur* (1998, 353) only notes that Biermann lived in East Berlin from 1953 to 1986 [sic].

The response to this shocking move was quick and defiant. At potentially great individual cost, a dozen well-known GDR authors wrote and published a letter in a West German newspaper protesting Biermann's expatriation and demanding it be rescinded (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 52; *P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 395).<sup>5</sup> Over the next few days, more authors and artists added their names to the petition. Many of them suffered personal and professional retaliation, such as being shut out of the GDR Writers' Union, facing (additional) Stasi observation, or receiving open "invitations" from the SED to consider defecting themselves.

The term *Biermann-Ausbürgerung* (Biermann expatriation) has thus become a kind of shorthand for the lengths to which the SED would go in an attempt to control GDR literature and authors. It is clearly an important event in GDR literary history, as evidenced by the fact that all textbooks after 1985 which include any mention of Biermann also mention his expatriation. It is here, however, where differences become apparent: some textbooks quickly brush past events while others provide a detailed account. Even textbooks making similar decisions about the level of detail can often vary in tone. At some point in many textbooks, the discussion becomes less about the critical author Wolf Biermann and more about the GDR itself; perhaps more accurately, about societal attitudes about the GDR and the SED at the time (and place) each textbook was produced. As we will see, textbooks run the gamut from texts by Biermann to texts about him to texts about the cultural politics of the GDR writ large.

### BIERMANN IN CURRICULA

The importance of literary history in the *Oberstufe*, and the challenge of balancing literature and history in the portrayal of Biermann, is not only evidenced in textbooks, but in the curricula that shape them. Evaluating this balance is made more difficult by trends in curricular design which have moved away from including lists of suggested authors and/or time periods. It is safe to say, however, that curricula recognize Biermann as an "exemplary" author (as discussed in Chap. 2); of the six curricula which include extensive lists of suggested authors and works, four include

<sup>5</sup>Readers familiar with Cuba may see similarities to the Padilla affair of 1971. (Thanks again to my colleague, Nancy Gates Madsen, for pointing out this connection). Both Biermann and Padilla are examples of the perils of critical writing in socialism.

Biermann.<sup>6</sup> These four curricula are all from states in Eastern Germany (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 1991 and 1999, Sachsen 1992 and 2001), indicating that educational decision makers in the former GDR were intent on (re-)claiming critical Eastern German literature in the decades immediately following German reunification. In contrast, two generations of curricula from Bayern (1992 and 2009) completely omit Biermann from their multi-page lists of suggested readings, which do include other GDR authors.<sup>7</sup> The 1982 Nordrhein-Westfalen curriculum, known for including many contemporary authors before other states did, suggests Biermann's "political songs" for units on contemporary poetry or political poetry through the ages (NRW 1982, 126). Although there are some regional contrasts, and the most current generation of curricula rarely includes author names, the author Biermann is very much present in curricula.

Biermann's writings are far from the only topic of interest in curricula, however, as evidenced by three generations of curricula in Sachsen. Beginning in 1992 with the first post-unification curriculum, the historical and cultural impacts of Biermann's expatriation are included in units on GDR literature, with some differing requirements for basic and advanced courses. Both courses devote several weeks of grade 12 to post-1945 literature, including "literature of the GDR between a Marxist understanding of art, political developments and 'aesthetic emancipation'" (Sachsen 1992, 80).<sup>8</sup> The basic course concentrates on "basic research on literary and artistic developments" and includes several suggested authors, although not Biermann (Ibid., 80–81). In contrast, the advanced course covers "basic research on the Marxist understanding of art, work in archives, use of literary histories," emphasizing even more the ideological

<sup>6</sup>Several other curricula include suggested readings for individual topics, but these are not included here.

<sup>7</sup>It is impossible to know why Biermann is omitted in the Bayern curricula, but one possible explanation is that he simply is not viewed as a literary author. The situation is somewhat reminiscent of the criticism expressed by some literary critics when Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016. Another explanation is that Biermann's outspoken support of socialism was viewed as problematic by curriculum authors in the conservative federal state. Other SED members (such as Christa Wolf) are included in the Bayern curriculum, but none who symbolized socialist convictions as strongly as Biermann.

<sup>8</sup>The advanced course adds more detail to this requirement: Literature of the GDR in the area of conflict between a Marxist understanding of art, tradition, Party politics/demands of the state and "aesthetic emancipation," literary stages, conflicts, resistance and caesuras using the example of prominent texts and authors of the genres" (Sachsen 1992, 97).

context in which GDR literature was produced. One of the suggested topics is “exodus and confrontation, especially after 1976 (Biermann)” (Ibid., 98). In this instance, Biermann is not mentioned so much as an author, but as a symbol of SED oppression and of the impact his expatriation had on the creative community of the GDR. Students will not necessarily read texts *by* Biermann, but will encounter texts *about* him. Both the basic and advanced courses require coverage of “authors who left the GDR,” but do not include Biermann in the list of suggested authors—possibly because he did not consciously defect from the GDR, but was forbidden from returning from what was intended to be a short concert tour (Ibid.). The 2001 Sachsen curriculum is nearly identical, although it does add Biermann’s name to the basic course list of “GDR authors who left the country” (Sachsen 2001, 88). By 2013, the requirements have been streamlined and are identical for both courses: “take a position on GDR literature in the tension between exodus and confrontation,” with a suggested focus on “Wolf Biermann’s 1976 expatriation and its consequences” (Sachsen 2013, 42, 50).<sup>9</sup> These curricula suggest that at least in Sachsen, Biermann is viewed both as an author and as a symbol for larger socio-political upheaval.<sup>10</sup>

Curricula therefore establish the dual tensions surrounding the portrayal of Biermann in textbooks: texts by him or about him, as well as an emphasis on Biermann himself or the aftermath of his expatriation. These tensions become yet more apparent in textbooks, particularly those of the most recent generation.

## READING WOLF BIERMANN

Texts by Biermann obviously play a key role in his overall portrayal in textbooks. When looking at general inclusion rates for Biermann texts (see Table 5.1), a few trends become clear which mirror those of other authors:

<sup>9</sup>Nearly all of the requirements in the 2013 curriculum direct students to “take a position” on things. There is no separate requirement to study GDR authors who left the country.

<sup>10</sup>The 1992 Bayern curriculum and the 1999 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern curriculum both require coverage of GDR literature and include the suggested topics “cultural politics of the SED and their impact; forms of confrontation, expatriations, literary controversies” (Bayern 362—advanced course, MV 41,45—both basic and advanced course). No authors are specified for these units, but Biermann would be an obvious choice. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern includes Biermann in its list of suggested readings at the end of the curriculum, while Bayern omits him completely.

**Table 5.1** Inclusion of Biermann as an author

	<i>Textbooks</i>	<i>Texts/(unique)<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>GDR context<sup>*</sup></i>	<i>Non-GDR context</i>
1985	2 (of 8)	3 / (3)	0	3
1995	3 (of 8)	3 / (3)	2	1
2005	4 (of 7)	5 / (5)	2	3
2015	6 (of 8)	13 / (8)	11	2

<sup>a</sup>“Unique” here is only within each year. For example, several of the eight unique texts for 2015 are also found in older textbooks. Across all 31 textbooks, there are 15 unique texts

<sup>\*</sup>Labeled as such: GDR, divided Germany, literature after 1945, etc

inclusion rises over time, certain texts become established as textbook favorites, and texts more often appear in a GDR context. The portrayal of Biermann simultaneously becomes more robust and more limited; students encounter Biermann more frequently, but from an increasingly restricted perspective.

The most basic measure of inclusion—number of texts and textbooks over time—reveals that Biermann has become ever more established as part of the textbook canon over the past 30 years. In 1985, he is represented in only 25 percent of textbooks, and by 2015 his texts appear in 75 percent of them. While not apparent in Table 5.1, 2015 is also the first year that any individual textbook includes more than two Biermann texts; *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010) and *P.A.U.L. D.* (2013) both include four. Inclusion of multiple texts by a single author can rightfully be interpreted as a sign of perceived literary importance and exemplarity. Based strictly on the number of texts over time and within individual textbooks, the inclusion of Biermann as an author becomes both broader and deeper.

At the same time that Biermann is becoming more widely included in textbooks, certain (types) of his texts become firmly anchored in the textbook canon. In an intriguing contrast to Anna Seghers, whose post-1945 texts are essentially omitted from textbooks, Biermann is represented nearly exclusively by his texts written in the GDR. Of the 31 textbooks in this study, only two of them include Biermann texts written after his expatriation.<sup>11</sup> Biermann’s GDR texts are obviously those of interest to

<sup>11</sup> *Passagen* (2001) includes “Kaspar Hauser singt” (1986) in a section about the figure of Kaspar Hauser in literature. *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010) includes “Heimat” (2006) in a chapter about being on the road and at home, specifically in a section titled “I Search for Peace and Find Strife,” a quotation from Biermann himself.

textbook authors. Within this group of texts, four appear more than once across all textbooks, and these four works represent 13 of the total 24 texts (see Table 5.2). By 2015, they comprise nearly 70 percent of all Biermann texts included in textbooks. As with so many Biermann poems, these four critically and clearly address the situation in the GDR and Biermann's disappointment with SED socialism. Consequently, it is no surprise that textbook authors select them for inclusion so frequently: these poems fit the "textbook image" of Biermann the GDR author.

The narrowing of Biermann's oeuvre in textbooks occurs in tandem with another development: the increasingly exclusive portrayal of him as an author in a GDR context. In 1985, the two textbooks which include Biermann texts (*Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* (1979), *Literatur: Lese- und Arbeitsbuch* (1976)) essentially remain silent about the connection of Biermann to the GDR. *Arbeitsbuch Deutsch*, which does have a "German Literature after 1945" chapter, includes its single Biermann text in a chapter about "literary small forms" (short stories, fairy tales, etc.). *Literatur: Lese- und Arbeitsbuch* is organized by genre, and situates its two Biermann texts in the extensive chapter on poetry. Both poems appear in a subchapter on "Individual and State," which seems to invite some mention of the GDR. Ultimately, however, the textbook leads readers right up to the GDR but leaves students and teachers to make the final leap on their own. Biermann's melancholy "Drei Worte an die Partei" (Three words to the party) is presented together with Johannes R. Becher's laudatory "Die Partei," (The party) and students are told that a comparison of these two poems is "worthwhile," but given no hints as to why (*Literatur: Lese- und Arbeitsbuch* 1976, 50). Students are informed that Becher's poem "was written in 1937 and published on December 14, 1957 in *Neues Deutschland*" (Ibid., 63), but not that *Neues Deutschland* was a major

**Table 5.2** Biermann texts most frequently included in textbooks

	1985	1995	2005	2015
Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus (Ballad of the Prussian Icarus)		1	1	4
Ermutigung (Encouragement)		1		2
Und als wir ans Ufer kamen (And as we came to shore)			1	1
Es senkt das deutsche Dunkel (The German gloom descends)				2



GDR paper, controlled by the SED, or that Becher was a fervent Party member. Reading questions mention the portrayal of the Party, what is said about its enemies, and the “prevailing mood” of both authors (Ibid.). Whereas current textbooks likely would emphasize Biermann’s personal story and the cultural politics of the SED, *Literatur: Lese- und Arbeitsbuch* focuses exclusively on the texts themselves, requiring students and/or teachers to provide historical context. This is not particular to Biermann, but reflects design principles found in many textbooks used in 1985.

After 1985, Biermann becomes more obviously positioned by textbooks as an author living and writing in the GDR. Rather than attempt to discuss each textbook individually, I have selected Biermann’s “Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus” (“Ballad of the Prussian Icarus”) to demonstrate this trend. The 1976 poem blends the image of the Prussian eagle with the Icarus myth to create the Prussian Icarus—a symbol for the GDR and doubtless for Biermann himself.<sup>12</sup> Typical of Biermann’s works, the poem directly addresses his love for the GDR and his frustration with the political reality. It describes the inability of the Prussian Icarus to fly away, and the barbed wire that surrounds the “half-country” that is the GDR (Molina 1996, 106). The speaker urges those who want out of the country to leave, but says that “I’ll hang on till this hated bird” comes and “yanks me over the edge,” at which point, he will become the Prussian Icarus himself (Ibid.).<sup>13</sup> As one might expect, the poem always appears in textbooks in its literary-historical context. Differences arise, however, in which emphasis is given to that context, and what reading questions and/or introductory texts are included along with it. Particularly the most recent (2015) generation of textbooks quickly shifts student attention from the poem itself to the events surrounding Biermann’s expatriation, presenting Biermann not so much as an author but as a victim of political persecution. GDR literature is portrayed less as the body of texts created by authors than as a system controlled by the SED, shifting autonomy from Biermann and his colleagues to the powers that be—both the SED and textbook authors.

<sup>12</sup>While I generally do not conflate the speaker of a poem with its author, Biermann invites readers to do so. The poem was published (Biermann 1978) with a cover picture of Biermann standing in front of the eagle on the railing of the Weidendammer Bridge over the Spree in East Berlin.

<sup>13</sup>The full poem in German can be found in Biermann (1978, 101–104).

The single 1995 and 2005 textbook which include the ballad (*Arbeit mit Texten* (1993) and *Sichtweisen* (2002)) share one important characteristic: they show the connections and interplay between FRG and GDR literature. *Arbeit mit Texten* begins the chapter “Themes of Current Literature” with the following statement: “The texts in the first section ‘Authors and Society’ show how authors in the West and in the East are involved in political events of the 1960s and 1970s” (*Arbeit mit Texten* 1993, 365). Within the “Authors and Society” section, “Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus” appears together with texts from other GDR and FRG authors. *Sichtweisen* includes the ballad in its “Literature From 1945 to Today” chapter, in a section titled “Germany, What Should I Do with You?” together with poems and text excerpts by authors from East and West.<sup>14</sup> Biermann’s ballad is depicted as part of a larger German literary history, not exclusively (or even predominantly) as a part of GDR literary history. It is worth pointing out here that *Arbeit mit Texten* was used in the Eastern German states of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen while *Sichtweisen* was used in Bayern, suggesting that the pre-2015 portrayal of Biermann as an author was not strongly tied to geography.

The most obvious difference in the portrayal of Biermann in *Arbeit mit Texten* and *Sichtweisen* is largely due to the fact that *Sichtweisen* does not include any reading comprehension questions. (It is one of the few post-1985 textbooks to continue this practice.) As a result, the presentation of “Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus” is totally dependent upon its placement in the chapter. *Arbeit mit Texten* includes two reading questions (at the end of the chapter), following the general trend of first including comprehension and textual analysis questions and then one or two questions about historical/political context. The first question in *Arbeit mit Texten* asks “which elements of the Icarus saga does Biermann use to depict his situation?” and the second question informs students that “this song was written not long before Biermann’s expatriation from the GDR, which called forth a wave of protest in East and West” (*Arbeit mit Texten* 1993, 383). The text of the Biermann petition is included as well, and is followed by the actual assignment for students: “The formulations in this resolution show experience in dealing with those in power. Compare this assessment of Wolf Biermann with the image he creates of himself”

<sup>14</sup> “Deutschland, was soll ich mit dir?” is a line from Friedrich Christian Delius’ 1965 poem “Hymne”, which also appears in the section.

(Ibid.).<sup>15</sup> While many other textbooks address the petition (as will be seen later), *Arbeit mit Texten* uses it in an intriguing way: sending students back to the text to discover how Biermann portrays himself rather than focusing their attention solely on the events surrounding his expatriation. While one cannot draw conclusions based upon a single textbook, this emphasis on literature over politics is fairly common in textbooks approved for use in Eastern Germany as well as for textbooks from 1985 and 1995.

By 2015 “Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus” appears in half of all analyzed textbooks, having established itself as part of the textbook canon.<sup>16</sup> Also clearly established is a growing delineation in the presentation of FRG and GDR literature. All four textbooks include the ballad in broad chapters on literature since 1945 (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010; *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost*; *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW*) or somewhat more specifically poetry since 1945 (*P.A.U.L. D.*). Upon closer examination it becomes apparent that textbook authors are choosing to present GDR literature (and therefore Wolf Biermann) in chapter sections separate from FRG literature. At times this is very clear, such as the chapter section “Poetry of the GDR” (*P.A.U.L. D.*). The remaining textbooks do not signal the separation in chapter section titles; instead they use titles such as “The Politicization of Literature and New Subjectivity: Between *Systemkritik* and Conformity” and then have a short introductory text about GDR literature followed by GDR texts and the same for the FRG (*Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost*).<sup>17</sup> This type of organization is potentially helpful to students, allowing them to identify similarities within West and East German literature before finding similarities between them. As the history of both countries becomes ever more distant, the additional contextual support of (separate) informational texts is warranted. On the

<sup>15</sup>This question is potentially problematic because it conflates the narrator of the poem with Biermann, but as previously mentioned, the text of the poem (and the picture which often accompanies it) do that as well.

<sup>16</sup>The poem also makes an “appearance” in *KombiKompakt* 12, in a reading question which directs students to “procure Biermann’s “Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus,” read it and interpret it” (236).

<sup>17</sup>This is similar in *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* (“Critical Literature and New Subjectivity: Leaving or Staying?”), except that a Herta Müller text is included as well. Müller grew up in a German-speaking community in Romania. *Blickfeld Deutsch* includes the poem in a chapter section “‘Art is Always Opposition to That Which Is’ (Schütz)—Considering Facets of Opposition in Selected Literary Examples.” The quote in the chapter section is from Stefan Schütz, an East German actor, dramatic advisor, and author who resettled in the FRG in 1980.

other hand, separating Biermann from his West German counterparts can perpetuate the othering of GDR literature and authors, especially if textbooks do not deliberately draw student attention to the interplay between FRG and GDR texts and history. It is clear here that Biermann is very overtly positioned as a GDR author in contemporary textbooks, and that the differences between East and West German literature are emphasized.<sup>18</sup>

The reading questions for “Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus” in textbooks used in 2015 serve to illustrate the range of the (literary) text—(historical) context spectrum. First, some similarities: *Blickfeld Deutsch, Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* and *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* directly tell students to review the Icarus saga, with both *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* versions also asking “to what extent is knowledge of the saga important in interpreting the poem?” (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 422; *TTS-NRW* 2009, 444). Each of these three textbooks has one other question highlighting textual analysis, ranging from exploring how “the speaker becomes the Prussian Icarus” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 425) to “noting the change in personal pronouns” (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 422; *TTS-NRW* 2009, 444). It is at this point where differences become more apparent. *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* includes no further questions, while *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* asks students to “compare how the lives of authors in the GDR are portrayed in texts by Biermann and Kunert” and includes an enrichment assignment asking students to research the events surrounding Biermann’s expatriation from the GDR (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 422).<sup>19</sup> These differences are very typical for the two *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* versions: the Nordrhein-Westfalen edition generally separates discussion of literature (reading questions) and politics/history (informational texts), while the edition for Eastern states more consciously combines them. *Blickfeld Deutsch* rounds out its reading questions for the poem by asking students to “explain why GDR authors liked to use this myth,” keeping the attention on GDR literature while not specifically on Biermann’s biography (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 425). Taken

<sup>18</sup>There is also more focus on Biermann himself, with three of the four 2015 textbooks including the famous picture of Biermann standing “in front of the Prussian eagle on the Weidendammer Bridge” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 425). In contrast to *Blickfeld Deutsch, Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* and *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* present the picture without any caption. *P.A.U.L. D.* includes an alternate picture, a view over the Berlin Wall into East Berlin.

<sup>19</sup>Günter Kunert was a GDR author as well. His short text “Die Schreie der Fledermäuse” immediately precedes the ballad.

as a group, the reading questions in these three textbooks reveal different decisions about how to portray Biermann as an author—solely concentrating on the text, posing general questions about the GDR, or specifically directing students to research Biermann’s expatriation. All of these are logical choices, but they do create quite different depictions of Biermann for students.

In contrast to the *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* series, both *Blickfeld Deutsch* and *P.A.U.L. D.* include other Biermann texts together with “Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus.” *Blickfeld Deutsch* includes a brief informational text about 1970s GDR literature directly before “Und als wir ans Ufer kamen” (And when we came to the shore) and the Icarus ballad, and follows them with the two-page “German-German biography” that will be examined in more detail later. *P.A.U.L. D.* presents a fairly lengthy biography and three other Biermann poems: “Ermutigung” (Encouragement) (1968), “Das macht mich populär” (That makes me popular) (1974, excerpt), and “Die Stasi-Ballade” (The Stasi ballad) (1974, excerpt). It is the only textbook to excerpt “Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus” rather than to include the full text, printing only the first six lines from the second verse. While poetic—presenting the GDR as a country “girdled with the barbed-wire bandage” (Molina 1996)—this short segment of the poem provides only limited insight into the entire ballad. The excerpt is introduced with the statement “At his 1976 concert in the Cologne Colosseum, which was approved by the GDR, Wolf Biermann sings his ‘Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus’” (*P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 397). The focus here shifts from the text and its critique of the GDR to the events surrounding the concert and Biermann’s expatriation.<sup>20</sup> Reading comprehension questions ask students what “impression” they have from the three excerpts (“Ermutigung” has separate questions) and whether they can “recognize a development from his earlier texts” (Ibid.). Students are also told to “analyze the critique of the GDR and SED politics and characterize the way in which it is exhibited” before they “connect your findings with the history of the expatriation campaign against Wolf Biermann and take a critical stance. Evaluate particularly the words of the petition” (Ibid., 398). The final question extends the discussion of the

<sup>20</sup>The events of 1976 are the main topic of the biographical text about Biermann which appears two pages earlier in the textbook.

consequences of the Biermann “affair.”<sup>21</sup> In both textbooks, “Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus” (along with the other Biermann texts) is used less as a literary text than as a vehicle for a broader discussion about the GDR itself.

It is clear to see that Biermann has become more firmly established as part of the textbook canon over time, and that by 2015 he is predominantly presented in a GDR context. This then requires textbooks to make decisions about how much priority to place on literary texts or historical context. With Biermann’s writings and biography being so intimately linked to the ideological battles of the GDR, textbooks face challenging questions about how to portray Biermann the author, as evidenced by the close analysis of “Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus.” Over time, the emphasis in many textbooks shifts away from literary texts and towards politics. The intent of textbooks, however, does seem to be to inform students about the socio-political context in which Biermann wrote, not to engage in explicit ideology critique.

### READING ABOUT BIERMANN

Due to his expatriation and the controversy surrounding it, Biermann is written about in many textbooks, regardless of whether his texts appear in them. This is understandable, as one of the overarching goals of literary instruction in the *Oberstufe* is a review of literary history. Table 5.3 reflects the growing popularity of Biermann in textbooks over time—both as an author and as a critic (or victim) of SED politics. It also reveals larger shifts in textbook design, as informational texts, timelines, author biographies, and even reading questions provide additional opportunities for students to read about Biermann. While few textbooks used in 1985 included Biermann at all, nearly all of the most current generation of textbooks include texts by and about him. This offers students multiple “encounters” with Biermann and more fully integrates his texts into their historical context, while also giving textbooks a large degree of control over how they portray Biermann.

<sup>21</sup>The final question reads as follows: “In a poem from the same year (1976), Jürgen Rennert wrote the following verse: To leave or / to stand at the window and stay / alternatives. Between them / nothing but the fallacy of writing... What does Rennert mean with “fallacy of writing”? To what extent can his poem be understood as a reaction to the affair?” (*P.A.U.L. D.* 2013, 398).

**Table 5.3** Inclusion of texts by and about Biermann

	<i>Include texts by Biermann</i>	<i>Include texts about Biermann</i>	<i>Briefly mention Biermann</i>	<i>Omit Biermann completely</i>
1985 (of 8 books)	2	0	2	5
1995 (of 8 books)	3	3	5	1
2005 (of 7 books)	4	1	3	1
2015 (of 8 books)	6	7	8	0

Note: The sum of each row is generally greater than the total number of textbooks from each year because many textbooks include Biermann in multiple ways (texts by him, informational texts about him, brief mentions in connection to other authors, etc.)

In contrast to the fairly restrained portrayal of Biermann as an author, textbooks reveal their ideological viewpoints—and by extension the predominant (regional) cultural attitudes of the time in which they were written—quite openly in informational texts relating to Biermann. Because Biermann’s expatriation is thematized in so many textbooks, it would be somewhat unwieldy to include them all here. Therefore, I have chosen to highlight the *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* series over time. With editions in 1990, 1999, and two versions in 2009, the series reflects larger trends over time in the portrayal of Biermann in literary-historical informational texts. My analysis then will shift to three other textbooks which cover Biermann in more detail, either in timelines (*Kennwort 13* 1994; *Literatur* 1998) or in extended biographical sections (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010). What will become clear is that Biermann himself is often not the real topic of informational texts; instead, his name is used as symbolic shorthand for larger events in the GDR in the late 1970s.

### Texte, Themen und Strukturen

*Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (1990) does not include any texts by Biermann, so his entire portrayal is dependent upon the multi-page informational text “The Literature of the German Democratic Republic,” which covers the entire 40-year history of the GDR (*TTS* 1990, 263–65). Immediately preceding the paragraph about Biermann, the liberalization period under Erich Honecker in the early 1970s is mentioned, along with

his famous quotation: “When one starts from a firm socialist position, in my opinion there can be no taboos in the field of art and literature” (Ibid., 265). The textbook states that criticism was tolerated, but was not allowed to “go beyond a certain boundary.” Biermann, however, “went beyond this boundary in his texts, was banned from performing in the GDR as of 1965 and was expatriated during a concert tour in the Federal Republic of Germany” (Ibid.).<sup>22</sup> This brief explanation of the lead-up to Biermann’s expatriation is actually the most detailed of all four *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* versions, but is somewhat overshadowed by the detailing of the resulting fallout in the GDR:

The strong wave of solidarity with the ostracized among GDR authors caused the unsettled government to resort to a more rigid cultural-political course. Those who took too strong a position in the protest movement around Biermann and did not renounce it were suspended from the Writers Union or prompted to leave for the Federal Republic. From this point on, a true exodus of well-known authors began (Jurek Becker, Sarah Kirsch, Günter Kunert, Erich Loest, Monika Maron, etc.) This was a great loss for intellectual life in the GDR and an inestimable enrichment for the literary scene in the Federal Republic. (Ibid.)

The emphasis here has shifted from Biermann himself to the larger socio-political situation in the GDR in 1976 and after.<sup>23</sup> Individual “well-known authors” are listed to reinforce the importance of the “exodus,” but it appears to be left to individual readers to determine whether Biermann belongs to this group. It is worth pointing out that the 1990 version of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* makes note of the “inestimable enrichment” for literature in the FRG, recognizing the authors not just as victims of political oppression, but as writers. The literary aspect of literary history is not overlooked, although none of these authors are represented by their own texts because the textbook does not include texts by any contemporary authors.

The second generation of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (1999) likewise includes extensive informational texts covering “Literature in the German Democratic Republic,” but breaks them up and intersperses them

<sup>22</sup>The slight discrepancy in chronology is not addressed: Honecker came to power in 1971, but Biermann’s stage ban pre-dated this.

<sup>23</sup>Some authors, such as Sarah Kirsch and Jurek Becker, defected as early as 1977. Monika Maron defected in 1988.



with texts representing specific time periods or styles. Biermann appears in “Liberalizing Tendencies and New Reprisals/Backlashes.”<sup>24</sup> Two sentences are devoted to the liberalizing tendencies after Honecker’s rise to power (his quotation from the 1990 version is eliminated), followed by the sentence “This period ended with Wolf Biermann’s expatriation in 1976” (*TTS* 1999, 348). Although students likely know that Biermann was problematic in the GDR (his prologue to the movie *Spur der Steine* appears five pages earlier and students are asked to discuss why the film was banned in the GDR), they are provided no additional information about why the “period of liberalization” ended when it did or why it ended with Biermann. The petition protesting Biermann’s expatriation is not mentioned, but the “increased reprisals against critical authors” are, continuing the trend from the 1990 edition of detailing the impact on other well-known authors:

Christa Wolf could not be silenced because she was so popular; she continued to publish. Stefan Heym, Kurt Bartsch, Adolf Endler, Erich Loest and others were banned from the Writers Union in 1979. Reiner Kunze experienced this already in 1976. In the light of such conditions, over 100 authors left the GDR, including Sarah Kirsch, Reiner Kunze, Günter Kunert, Jurek Becker, Monika Maron, Erich Loest. (*Ibid.*)

In comparison to the 1990 version, the focus on the consequences for other authors is even greater. Biermann himself is not mentioned at all, nor is the impact on West German literature. Instead, the oppressive role of SED cultural politics is highlighted—a trend found in several post-unification textbooks. Informational texts have become more obviously focused on ideological critique of the GDR.

The 2009 regional editions of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen*—for Nordrhein-Westfalen and for Eastern Germany—position their discussion of Biermann’s expatriation in similar contexts. Both textbooks include extensive informational texts titled “German-Language Literature between

<sup>24</sup> Each block of information is followed by a brief list of “important authors and works.” Biermann is mentioned under “literature of arrival” (*Ankunfts-literatur*) for his poetry collections *Mit Marx und Engelszungen* and *Für meine Genossen*. The informational text itself discusses the “generation of young poets” who “impatiently requested the realization of communist ideals and continually reminded of the Marxist dream of a society free of domination” (*TTS* 1999, 346). Biermann is not mentioned by name. He also is not included in the list of important authors and works for the “Liberalizing Tendencies” block.

1960 and 1989.” These include multiple paragraphs of general historical background followed by information about the worldview in both countries. It is in this section that the events surrounding Biermann are discussed, and where differences in tone become apparent. Both versions mention the improvements made after Erich Honecker came to power in 1971, but *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* provides more context and *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* more criticism. Here are the excerpts for comparison:

OST: After the change in power from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker in 1971 there was a phase of relative economic wealth for the population. Honecker announced the “end of all taboos in art” in the GDR, admittedly only “when one begins from a firm socialist position.” This easing of cultural politics continued until the mid-1970s. (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 433)

NRW: With the change in power from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker in 1971 the supply situation for the population improved. The easing of cultural politics continued until the mid-1970s. (*TTS-NRW* 2009, 448)

It is evident that *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* does not include as much historical context about the situation in the GDR, but a closer look also reveals a difference in tone. Whereas *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* describes the economic situation as one of “relative economic wealth,” the Nordrhein-Westfalen version says that the “supply situation improved.” Both of these can be considered accurate, but they reveal (and perpetuate) different attitudes about the GDR itself. Criticism of the SED regime is more pronounced in the version used in Western Germany, and one wonders to what extent it impacts students’ still-developing impression of GDR literature and culture.

Biermann’s expatriation and its aftermath receive a few brief sentences immediately following the excerpts quoted above:

OST: In 1976 the songwriter Wolf Biermann was deported (*ausgewiesen*); numerous authors protested without success. Many left the country. (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 433)

NRW: In 1976 the songwriter Wolf Biermann was expatriated (*ausgebürgert*) by the GDR government during a concert tour in the Federal Republic; numerous authors protested without success. Many of them left the country. (*TTS-NRW* 2009, 448)

Again, while the information is the same, small differences are important. *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* chooses to use the slightly milder term “*ausgewiesen*” instead of “*ausgebürgert*,” and the Nordrhein-Westfalen version points out that Biermann was expatriated “by the GDR government.”<sup>25</sup> Both textbooks, though, have moved away from the previous lists of well-known author names, shifting attention from individual fates (however briefly) to the consequences for “many.” The differences between versions are generally a matter of tone.

The three generations of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* reveal that students actually read very little about Biermann in informational texts which cover his expatriation and its aftermath, and that information specifically pertaining to him decreases over time. Instead, Biermann’s name increasingly serves as shorthand for an entire era in the GDR, an era most critically described in newer editions of the textbook series.

### Kennwort 13 *and* Literatur

*Kennwort 13* and *Literatur* warrant a closer look because both textbooks provide a somewhat more in-depth portrayal of Wolf Biermann’s expatriation. They reflect the numerous decisions textbook authors face as well, such as what information to include, how much to include, and how to present it. Neither textbook includes texts by Biermann, but Biermann is very much present in the narrative the textbooks create about GDR literature as a whole.

Before we turn our attention to Biermann’s expatriation, a brief sketch of the chapters will help provide informative context. *Kennwort 13* has three separate chapters for literature 1945–1990: Postwar Period and the Adenauer Era, Literature in the GDR, and Literature from 1960 to the Present. This last chapter nearly exclusively includes West German and Austrian literature, with only two of the 15 texts written by authors living in the GDR, underscoring the separation of GDR literature from other German-language works.<sup>26</sup> GDR literature, whether written before or

<sup>25</sup> *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* concludes this paragraph with the claim that “defection (*Republikflucht*) remained the central problem of German-German relations” (433) while *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* informs students that “In the wake of this, the ‘Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe’ formed in the 1980s” (448).

<sup>26</sup> The two texts are Johannes Bobrowski’s 1961 poem “Seeufer” (Lakeshore) and Peter Huchel’s 1963 poem “Unter der Wurzel der Distel” (Under the thistle root). After years of victimization by the *Stasi*, Huchel was allowed to leave the GDR in 1971.

after 1960, is contained within the “Literature in the GDR” chapter, subtly implying that West German literature is more modern than its East German counterpart. In contrast, *Literatur* has a single chapter for this time period, “Postwar Societies in East and West.” These differences reflect previous findings that some textbooks emphasize the differences between FRG and GDR literature, while others highlight their shared literary qualities.

The focus of each chapter is initially revealed visually. While *Literatur* places Wolfgang Mattheuer’s 1989 painting *Ikarus erhebt sich* (Icarus rises) on the first page, *Kennwort 13* has selected a page from author Reiner Kunze’s Stasi file. This striking difference is understandable when one notes that the title of the first section of the *Kennwort 13* chapter is “Texts about the Literary Politics of the SED.” The Stasi file picture is followed by several related texts: an IM-report about Jürgen Fuchs, a review of a worker’s Bitterfelder Weg-era poem by a member of the Central Committee (ZK) of the SED, and a harshly critical review of a Wolf Biermann poem published in 1965 in *Neues Deutschland*.<sup>27</sup> The picture and texts are presented without an introduction and the tasks for students center largely around politics.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, *Literatur* follows the Icarus painting with a brief note that there is no introduction to this chapter “because the texts should not primarily be read as documents of a (bygone) literary history, but as literature which reaches into the present and which wants to directly challenge its readers” (*Literatur 1998*, 278). The only post-unification textbook from the former GDR publisher Volk und Wissen, *Literatur* takes a unique perspective on post-1945 literature, not obviously categorizing texts or contextualizing them via an introduction. Texts from all four major German-speaking countries written in the past 50 years are included and are interspersed with photos (generally of authors). Reading questions and tasks for students are placed at the end of the chapter.

<sup>27</sup> IM = *Inoffizieller/Informeller Mitarbeiter* (private citizens who informed for the *Stasi*). The Bitterfelder Weg was a literary movement in the GDR intended to connect literature and workers.

<sup>28</sup> The asks are as follows:

1. Explain the function of both reviews and the IM-report. Evaluate the references/sources as well. Inform yourself about the authors Wolf Biermann and Jürgen Fuchs.
2. Develop the evaluation criteria and the political-ideological goals of the author.
3. Interpret the poems which appear in the reviews. Analyze the literary understanding of the SED critics. (*Kennwort 13 1994*, 209).

Student attention is therefore directed in sharply differing directions in *Kennwort 13* and *Literatur*: once very overtly on the oppressive cultural politics of the SED and once on the literature produced by authors in East and West. Again, this contrast is not specific to the portrayal of Biermann, but often seems to extend to textbooks used in Bayern (*Kennwort 13*) and in Eastern Germany (*Literatur*).<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to many other textbooks, both *Kennwort 13* and *Literatur* provide students with information about Biermann's biography and cultural politics in the GDR before the events of 1976.<sup>30</sup> The timeline in *Kennwort 13* mentions Biermann's 1953 move from Hamburg to the GDR, and both textbooks include an entry about the 1965 plenum of the Central Committee of the SED. *Literatur* makes frequent use of direct quotations from the plenum itself, describing it as the beginning of the third "cultural war" in the GDR, against the "ideology of a shoreless bourgeois skepticism" and "objective agreement with the adversary" (Ibid., 303). Biermann is included in a list of six authors against whom the "war" was being waged. *Kennwort 13* makes less use of SED-ese and provides an early hint of things to come for Biermann:

On the docket of the plenum of the Central Committee of the SED are works from Stefan Heym and Wolf Biermann, along with statements by chemistry professor Robert Havemann, which contradict the Party. In the coming years, the secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, Erich Honecker, will settle the score with Wolf Biermann, whom he accuses early in 1966 of "betraying basic socialist positions with his songs and poems." The songwriter had published his *Drachtbarfe* in West Berlin and consequently receives a performance ban in the GDR. (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 211)

<sup>29</sup>To some extent, the timelines in each textbook continue this bifurcated portrayal of GDR literature. *Kennwort* titles its 1945–1989 timeline "Information: Conditions of Literature in the GDR," openly indicating that the emphasis will be on cultural politics. The timeline is also prominently placed directly in the chapter. In contrast, *Literatur* places its much broader, untitled 1900–1989 timeline at the end of the chapter, after reading comprehension questions and a list of suggested FRG/GDR films.

<sup>30</sup>*Kennwort* does not include a separate biographical text about Biermann, but does incorporate pre-1976 information about him in its timeline. Only five textbooks include biographical texts about Biermann, which is somewhat low in comparison to other well-known contemporary authors. This is possibly due to the fact that Biermann is mentioned so frequently in informational texts.

This is one of the most in-depth explanations of the early years of Biermann's long performance ban in the GDR and stands in stark contrast to the lack of attention paid to Biermann in informational texts in the *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* series. Additionally, both *Kennwort 13* and *Literatur* provide information about Erich Honecker's famous 1971 "no taboos" declaration (quoted in full in *Kennwort 13*, shortened a bit in *Literatur*). *Kennwort 13* describes this as a "new course in literary politics" (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 211) and *Literatur* as "relative leeway for the arts" (*Literatur* 1998, 303). While the 1971 entries do not mention Biermann by name, they do provide students with a better understanding that "conditions for literature in the GDR" were not stagnant for 40 years, and that critical literature seemed possible, perhaps even welcomed, in the early 1970s.

With this background information, then, students approach the events of 1976 and Biermann's expatriation. *Literatur* is nearly terse, limiting this part of its 1976 entry to the phrase "expatriation of Wolf Biermann from the GDR after his concert in Dortmund" (*Literatur* 1998, 303).<sup>31</sup> The focus is on information, not on interpretation. *Kennwort 13* describes the circumstances as follows: "In a mix of sharp criticism of the SED and emphatic support of socialism, Wolf Biermann believes in change in the GDR. Willingly leaving the country is out of the question for him. During a concert tour in the Federal Republic of Germany, the songwriter is stripped of his GDR citizenship (16 November)" (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 211). *Kennwort 13* much more obviously portrays Biermann as a true socialist voice in the wilderness of SED politics and draws attention to the failure of the "no taboos" attitude declared just 5 years earlier. It is also the textbook which concentrates the most on Biermann himself rather than using his name as symbolic shorthand.

Both *Literatur* and *Kennwort 13* logically cover the public outcry in the GDR over Biermann's expatriation. *Kennwort 13* informs students that within days, "12 prominent authors protest against the violent and deceitful expatriation," listing the names of all 12 original signers, along with the statement that "over 150 authors and artists sign the protest letter to the government (only published in the West)" (Ibid.). *Literatur* does not mention the protest letter, but follows its very brief mention of the expatriation with the statement that "in the ensuing years many

<sup>31</sup>While many textbooks emphasize Biermann's concert in Cologne as the catalyst for his expatriation, the official notice was given a few days later (after the Dortmund concert).

authors leave the GDR, along with visual artists, actors and directors” and a list of a dozen names (*Literatur* 1998, 303).<sup>32</sup> Once again, it is *Kennwort 13* that fills in the details, with the following information: “The SED proceeds with varying measures against the signatories of the Biermann letter. Thomas Brasch and Ulrich Schacht go to the Federal Republic after their release from prison. Bernd Jentzsch does not return to Berlin from his stay in Switzerland” (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 212). The description continues in the 1977 *Kennwort 13* entry, saying that “whoever refuses to retract their protest against the expatriation of Biermann is publicly defamed and trailed by the Stasi. The exodus of unyielding GDR authors continues: Reiner Kunze, Sarah Kirsch, Jurek Becker, Jürgen Fuchs (after jail) and Hans Joachim Schädlich leave the GDR; six members of an author group in Jena are deported directly from pre-trial custody” (Ibid.). While *Kennwort 13* seems very invested in emphasizing oppression before and after Biermann’s expatriation, *Literatur* downplays it. This again mirrors previous findings in textbooks used in Bayern (*Kennwort 13*) versus those used in Eastern Germany (*Literatur*) and likely reinforces existing attitudes about the GDR, if not about Biermann himself.

In contrast to nearly all other books, *Kennwort 13* and *Literatur* do not completely forget about Biermann after 1976, with both of them briefly mentioning him in their 1989 entries. Again, the tone of each textbook becomes clear. *Literatur* includes Biermann in a list of authors after the following information: “9 November: opening of the Wall; afterwards numerous authors from West and East Germany take part in discussions about German unification” (*Literatur* 1998, 303). *Kennwort 13* informs students that “for the first time after 25 years of a performance ban—13 years after his expatriation—Wolf Biermann (2 December) performs again in the GDR” (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 213). The following sentences are even more interesting, however: “authors and editors claim not to have known that the large GDR publishing houses were held by the SED. They react with dismay to this disclosure” (Ibid.). It is likely that students using *Kennwort 13* react(ed) to the authors’ claim of ignorance with disbelief and even scorn. The signers of the Biermann protest letter are mentioned as well, in that the GDR Writers’ Union “rescinded the[ir] expulsion,” but refused to take any other steps, resulting in the voluntary resignation of

<sup>32</sup> *Literatur* is the only textbook to include the names of artists, not just authors: Sarah Kirsch, Günter Kunert, Reiner Kunze, Erich Loest, Thomas Brasch, Jurek Becker, Manfred Krug, Egon Günther, Benno Besson, Katharina Thalbach, Hilmar Thate, Angelika Domröse.

several authors (Ibid.). Both statements seem designed to critique individuals and organizations associated with the GDR, or more specifically with the SED, a typical choice for the openly ideologically critical *Kennwort* series.

In the end, the timeline entries in *Literatur* and *Kennwort 13* include noticeably more information specifically about Biermann than do the informational texts in the *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* series. While there are differences in tone, with *Kennwort 13* highlighting GDR critique more than *Literatur* does, both textbooks provide context for the larger societal situation in the GDR while not overlooking Biermann himself. This is especially important since neither textbook includes any texts by Biermann; students are therefore reliant upon texts about him.

### Blickfeld Deutsch

While *Kennwort 13* and *Literatur* devote more space to Biermann than most textbooks do, he is clearly part of a larger “GDR timeline” context. *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010) takes a different approach, devoting a two-page “German-German résumé” (*deutsch-deutscher Lebenslauf*) to him which combines texts by and about Biermann.<sup>33</sup> The résumé is visually interesting, with two large photos, a hand-written version of a song (“Ermutigung”) and the newspaper article from *Neues Deutschland* reporting on his expatriation.<sup>34</sup> Situated around these artifacts are five stations of Biermann’s life with questions/assignments for students; for example “The Songwriter,” which instructs students to “inform yourselves in more detail about Wolf Biermann’s biography (page 52), in which the Cologne concert on 13 November 1976 is a turning point” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 426). The events surrounding Biermann—rather than GDR cultural politics writ large—are definitely the focal point of this narrative.

As in other textbooks, the majority of attention is devoted to developments immediately leading up to and following Biermann’s expatriation. Station Two, “The Concert in Cologne,” highlights texts by Biermann and directs students to two songs from the concert on the CD included

<sup>33</sup>There is a second German-German résumé in *Blickfeld Deutsch* for GDR author Reiner Kunze.

<sup>34</sup>One photo shows Biermann at an unidentified public reading/performance (likely Cologne); the other is captioned “performance in Cologne: ‘Nothing that would have distressed me in retrospect.’”



with the textbook, instructing them to analyze the political statements and the “unique linguistic/musical means of expression that characterize the texts” (Ibid.). This is immediately followed by Station Three, “The Expatriation,” which has students researching the “exact sequence of events in the context of the expatriation,” analyzing the press release from *Neues Deutschland*, and writing an article about the incidents from the “West German point of view” (Ibid.). This is followed by the entire text of the protest letter from GDR authors, along with the initial 12 signatories. In Station Four, “The Consequences of the Open Letter,” students are encouraged to analyze the protest letter and to “portray which political position is represented and how Wolf Biermann is assessed” (Ibid., 427). Students are then assigned to research the lives of the initial signatories after the letter was published. The final assignment here is somewhat less expected: students are asked to discuss literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki’s reaction to the expatriation. A short excerpt of his essay from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* is included directly below Station Four. *Blickfeld Deutsch* is one of the only textbooks to include detailed, first-hand West German responses to Biermann’s expatriation, highlighting its impact beyond the GDR but likewise potentially implying that the events were important largely because West Germany took note of them.

As the main topic of the two-page spread ostensibly is Biermann’s entire career (and not just 1976), the final station, “The Honorary Citizen of Berlin,” fast forwards to 2007. Students are very briefly informed that Biermann received honorary citizenship from the city of Berlin on March 26, 2007. They are then told to “hold a laudation in honor of the artist, in which you recognize his contribution to freedom and democracy and also address his biography and his artistic methods of expression” (Ibid.). The emphasis here is predominantly on Biermann as a symbol of resistance, but his writings are acknowledged as well. Overall, this German-German résumé offers an intriguing combination of texts by and about Biermann, as well as a focus specifically on him vs. the larger socio-political situation in the GDR. Considering the openly GDR-critical tone often found in *Blickfeld Deutsch*, this generally even-handed exploration of Biermann’s life and writings is a pleasant contrast. Students are presented with multiple voices and points-of-view—including Biermann’s own—and allowed to develop their own perspectives of Wolf Biermann.

Taken as a group, texts about Biermann often reveal a surprising lack of concentration on the author himself. Instead, Biermann’s expatriation predominantly and problematically serves as a symbol for larger ideological

struggles in the GDR. Why is this problematic, if one of the main emphases of literary instruction in the *Oberstufe* is, after all, literary history? The problem arises if Biermann is reduced to being merely a symbol of GDR repression. His expatriation is obviously part of literary history, but it is not the only aspect of his career worth being portrayed in textbooks, and the heavy-handed actions of the SED in the late 1970s are not the only aspect of GDR literature worth being discussed. This is especially true for textbooks which present only brief informational texts about 1970s GDR literature and do not include any texts by Biermann to balance the scales of the text-context continuum.

## CONCLUSION

The portrayal of Biermann in textbooks ultimately comes down to questions of whose voice is heard. Is Biermann allowed to “speak” through his own texts? If so, how are students directed to interact with those texts via reading questions and enrichment assignments? Do textbook authors produce texts about Biermann, and are these in addition to or in place of texts by Biermann himself? Do these informational texts actually center around Biermann, or do they use his name as shorthand for the larger literary situation in the GDR? As we have seen, textbooks approach and answer these questions of voice in multiple ways that reflect regional differences as well as shifts in attitudes about the GDR over time. From 1985, when textbooks largely overlooked texts by and about Biermann, to 2015, when Biermann’s texts are frequently included and at times also accompanied by informational texts which are overtly focused on ideological critique of the GDR, the portrayal of Biermann reminds us that everything is political, and that every story is controlled by the voice(s) allowed to tell it.

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## Everybody's Darling? Christa Wolf (and Günter Grass)

Christa Wolf occupies a unique position in the literary history of the GDR and (West) Germany. An SED member for 40 years (1949–1989), Wolf challenged the creative restrictions the Party placed on authors, but never pushed so hard that she was banished from the Party—or the country, like Wolf Biermann.<sup>1</sup> Her books were published to wide acclaim in both East and West Germany, and for many critics, Wolf's later works represented the victory of true socialist literature over the SED-condoned style of socialist realism.<sup>2</sup> As one might expect, textbooks reflect and (re)produce this unique status of Christa Wolf in their pages. She is widely recognized as an important author, appearing frequently in GDR and non-GDR chapters, with notably differing levels of emphasis on literary text or historical context. Her rejection of socialist realism is regularly noted in informational texts, as is her popularity in the FRG; indeed, these two

<sup>1</sup> Christa Wolf and her husband Gerhard were initial signatories of the Wolf Biermann petition. As a result, Gerhard Wolf's SED membership was revoked. In 1977, Christa Wolf was removed from the executive board of the Berlin chapter of the Writers Union and received an official "harsh reprimand" (*strenge Rüge*) from the SED; no further actions were taken.

<sup>2</sup> It must be acknowledged that SED reactions to Wolf's writings were not always positive. Her exploration of the shortcomings of real existing socialism in the lives of individuals was problematic for Party leaders. Wolf's popularity in both the GDR and the FRG allowed her a relatively large degree of autonomy.

things seem closely related. On bestseller lists and in textbooks, Christa Wolf truly is everybody's literary darling.

This status was abruptly challenged in the summer of 1990 after the publication of Wolf's novella *Was bleibt* (*What Remains*). Set in 1979, the text details a day in the life of a female GDR author under surveillance by the Stasi, describing the emotional and psychological toll this observation takes on the first-person narrator. As in previous texts, Wolf seems to be writing (semi-)autobiographically, leading readers to the understandable conclusion that *Was bleibt* is describing her personal experience of being surveilled by the Stasi. Reviews in the (largely West) German press ran the gamut from praise to harsh criticism, with the criticism generally directed at Wolf's actions rather than at the text itself. The paragon of GDR literature was accused of being disingenuous, of playing the victim card, of being a mouthpiece for the SED state. What started as an apparent controversy over *Was bleibt* quickly developed into a larger reckoning with GDR literature (and ultimately the GDR itself), with Christa Wolf at the center of the controversy generally referred to as the *Literaturstreit*. But how is the *Literaturstreit* thematized in textbooks? What impact does it have on Wolf's legacy?

This chapter analyzes the creation of Wolf's overwhelmingly positive reputation in (West) German textbooks, including the steps that textbooks take to protect Wolf's reputation after the *Literaturstreit*. My argument is that Wolf is widely portrayed as a GDR author worth reading, and that textbooks do not want the controversy about *Was bleibt* to negatively impact the long-established positive narrative surrounding her. Wolf's literary reputation is bolstered by not limiting her texts to chapters on GDR literature, by emphasizing her moments of resistance to the socialist regime, and ultimately by downplaying the *Literaturstreit*. Even textbooks which are generally very critical of the SED regime present Wolf in a positive light. In a slight departure from previous case studies, the latter part of this chapter includes a West German author, Günter Grass, in the analysis. As some readers may know, Grass unleashed public controversy upon the publication of his 2006 memoir *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* with his decades-delayed admission that he had been in the *Waffen-SS* during the last months of WWII. Textbooks approach the controversy surrounding both literary favorites in similar ways—by downplaying it—albeit with occasional contrasts which reveal an ongoing privileging of West German men over East German women.

## LITERARY (CON)TEXTS

Christa Wolf was one of the most popular authors in the GDR and was widely recognized in both East and West Germany for her literary talent.<sup>3</sup> She clearly counts as an “exemplary” author for *Oberstufe* textbooks, and her texts are extensively included in post-unification editions. In contrast to Wolf Biermann, whose texts appear nearly exclusively in a GDR context, Christa Wolf is represented in chapters ranging from Romanticism to women’s writing to WWII. The focus in these chapters is almost entirely on the literary texts, while chapters on GDR literature devote a great deal of attention to the literary and political context of the GDR itself. This same trend is observable with West German authors, but the reading questions and extra-literary texts that accompany Wolf’s writings in GDR chapters frequently reveal an underlying GDR critique—not necessarily of Wolf’s texts, but of the state itself. This critique is understandable, but also worth examining, as it subtly forms the ways in which students look back at the GDR.

Another element contributing to the depiction of Wolf in textbooks is excerpting. While Biermann and Becher are represented in textbooks by their poems and/or songs, Wolf (along with Seghers) nearly exclusively wrote long-form narratives and novels, which must be excerpted by textbook authors.<sup>4</sup> Selecting short excerpts from a longer text gives textbook authors a great deal of power to shape students’ interaction with a text, as two paragraphs or two pages suddenly stand in for a 200-page novel. The power of context (GDR vs. non-GDR) and excerpting will be revealed by a close analysis of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (*The Quest for Christa T.*) and *Kassandra (Cassandra)*, which are the most frequently-included Wolf texts in textbooks.

*Inclusion Levels*

As Table 6.1 illustrates, Wolf truly is considered exemplary by textbook authors after reunification. Her works appear in over 90 percent of analyzed textbooks (1995–2015), and many textbooks include multiple Wolf

<sup>3</sup>Wolf won roughly two dozen major prizes for her works, ranging from the National Prize of the German Democratic Republic (third-class, 1964; first-class, 1987) to the German Book Prize (2005) and the Thomas Mann Prize (2010). These are just a few examples.

<sup>4</sup>Brecht belongs in both of these groups. His poems appear frequently in textbooks, along with excerpts from his plays and his theoretical works.

**Table 6.1** Inclusion rates of Christa Wolf texts

	<i>Textbooks</i>	<i>Texts/(unique)<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>GDR context<sup>*</sup></i>	<i>Non-GDR context</i>
1985	1 (of 8)	1 / (1)	1	0
1995	7 (of 8)	11 / (7)	5	6
2005	7 (of 7)	18 / (12)	11	7
2015	7 (of 8)	22 / (12)	14**	8

<sup>a</sup>“Unique” here is only within each year. For example, several of the 12 unique texts for 2015 are found in older textbooks as well. Across all 31 textbooks, there are 15 unique texts

<sup>\*</sup>Labeled as such: GDR, divided Germany, literature after 1945, etc

<sup>\*\*</sup>Four of these texts appear in a *Wende*/post-1989 context, but are presented as (post-)GDR literature

texts. We also see that her writings frequently appear in non-GDR contexts, suggesting that she is viewed as an exemplary German author, not “merely” as an exemplary GDR author.

Two apparent exceptions to this view were school officials in the GDR and the authors of textbooks in use in 1985. Christa Wolf is not mentioned in the GDR curriculum, and none of her texts appear in the approved textbook *Literatur 11/12*. While GDR readers were definitely familiar with Christa Wolf in the 1980s, her questioning, critical texts likely strayed too far from the Party line to be suitable for impressionable socialist students.<sup>5</sup> In fact, many of the GDR authors best known in the West do not appear in GDR textbooks, leading to Wolfgang Brehmer’s (1987) claim of two GDR literatures—critical works read by West Germans and party line socialist literature for East German youth.<sup>6</sup> As far as the SED was concerned, all but a few of Wolf’s texts belonged to the former group. Her near omission from *West* German textbooks in use in 1985 is less a criticism of Wolf’s politics or her writing than the simple fact that contemporary literature in general was less common in textbooks. With the emphasis on the classics of German literature, even bestselling contemporary authors such as Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass appear in fewer than half of the analyzed textbooks used in 1985. The situation changes

<sup>5</sup>Wolf’s texts were quite current for a textbook published in 1980, meaning that they may have been viewed as not yet having stood the test of time. This, combined with her ambivalent attitudes toward real existing socialism, made Wolf a greater risk for GDR textbook authors.

<sup>6</sup>This topic is discussed in a bit more detail in Chap. 2.



significantly by 1995, with the GDR no longer in existence and a greater overall inclusion of contemporary literature.

As Christa Wolf was actively publishing during the timeframe of my analysis, some variation in which texts are included in textbooks is to be expected (see Table 6.2). Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that two works build the core of the Christa Wolf textbook canon over time: *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (the only text to appear 1985–2015) and *Kassandra*. With the exception of 1985, when *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is the only Wolf text included, and that in a single textbook, both *Kassandra* and *Nachdenken über Christa T.* appear in multiple textbooks each year. They are the only Wolf texts for which this is true 1995–2015. They can therefore help reveal larger trends in the portrayal of Wolf and her writing, particularly the level of GDR critique and the extent to which Wolf is depicted as part of the SED-controlled system or apart from it.

*Nachdenken über Christa T.* and *Kassandra* present intriguing contrasts in Christa Wolf's oeuvre. Published in 1968, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* represents Wolf's public break with the literary style of socialist realism (discussed in greater depth in Chap. 4), as well as her concerns about GDR-style socialism. Narrated by a close friend of Christa T.'s after Christa's death from cancer at age 35, the story suggests that the inflexible, conformist society of the GDR may have been the ultimate cause of

**Table 6.2** Wolf texts most frequently included in textbooks<sup>a</sup>

	1985 textbooks	1995 textbooks	2005 textbooks	2015 textbooks
<i>Der geteilte Himmel</i> (1963) ( <i>Divided Heaven</i> )		1	1	3
<i>Nachdenken über Christa T.</i> (1968) ( <i>The Quest for Christa T.</i> )	1	3	4	2
<i>Kindheitsmuster</i> (1976) ( <i>Patterns of Childhood</i> )		1	2	1
<i>Kassandra</i> (1983) ( <i>Cassandra</i> )		3	2	3
<i>Was bleibt</i> (1990) ( <i>What Remains</i> )				4

<sup>a</sup>These are the only Wolf texts which appear in more than three individual textbooks and/or at least three years (1985, 1995, 2005, 2015)

death.<sup>7</sup> As one might expect, the novel was controversial in the GDR and popular on both sides of the Berlin Wall. *Kassandra*, published in 1983, moves away from everyday life in the GDR and tells the story of the Trojan War from the perspective of the king's daughter and seer Cassandra. While the work can be read as a critique of the GDR state, it additionally addresses issues of patriarchy, feminism, war, and violence outside any national boundaries. Readers familiar with Wolf's work can see thematic connections (both between these two texts and between each text and her other works), but the substantially differing subject matter poses challenges for textbook authors, particularly in decisions about chapter placement, excerpt selection, and contextualization. The text-context spectrum is ever-present, with different approaches found in each textbook, and for each text. The common thread throughout, however, is the positive portrayal of Wolf and her texts.

### Nachdenken über Christa T.

Due to the subject matter of *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, the text is an obvious choice for inclusion in chapters about GDR/FRG literature, with their frequent dual emphasis on literary text and historical context. Indeed, eight of the 10 textbooks which include *Nachdenken über Christa T.* place it in chapters about post-1945 German literature, from "German Literature after 1945: Critique of the Established" (*Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* 1979) to "Between Conformity and Protest—Interpreting the Portrayal of the GDR in Literature" (*KombiKOMPACT-N* 2012).<sup>8</sup> Nearly all of these textbooks use their choice of excerpts and reading questions to highlight the growing disappointment with the limitations of GDR socialism and its oppressive impact on individuals found in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*,

<sup>7</sup>The title *Nachdenken über Christa T.* hints at a possible autobiographical connection to Christa Wolf. Wolf commonly played with this theme in her texts. Perhaps the most obvious example is *Was bleibt*.

<sup>8</sup>1985: "German Literature after 1945; Critique of the Established" (*Arbeitsbuch Deutsch*) 1995: "Literature after 1945: 'Nothing more than being human'" (*Blickfeld Deutsch*), "Literature from the GDR: Female Authors from the GDR" (*Kenntwort 13*); 2005: "Literature after 1945: 'Nothing more than being human'" (*Blickfeld Deutsch*), "After WWII (1945–1970)" (*Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen*), "Post-War Societies in East and West" (*Literatur*), "Literature since 1945: Going on Living, Going on Writing. 'Zero Hour'" (*Passagen*); 2015: "Between Conformity and Protest—Interpreting the Portrayal of the GDR in Literature" (*KombiKompakt-N*).

although (as always) they fall along a spectrum of ideological critique. Introductory and informational texts echo this trend, presenting the novel as a break with the mandated literary style of socialist realism, with some textbooks striving for a neutral tone and others openly criticizing anything connected to the GDR state. Text and context intermingle, and the battle over the worth of GDR literature, indeed the legacy of the GDR itself, is obviously still being fought. In all textbooks, though, Wolf and her text are portrayed positively; they stand on the “right” side of history.

Two textbooks reveal how *Nachdenken über Christa T.* can be used to help students grapple with the societal critique inherent in the text without resorting to heavy-handed condemnations of the GDR. *Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* (1979) presents an excerpt about a trip to West Berlin and then uses it to critique both GDR and FRG society. This is accentuated by the text being grouped together with texts from West German authors Heinrich Böll and Martin Walser—all three authors are categorized as “admonishers, warners and critics” (*Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* 1979, 16). The social critique is thus pan-German rather than specifically about the GDR, which is fairly typical in pre-unification West German textbooks. In the more current *KombiKOMPAKT-Ausgabe N* (2012), the novel excerpt addresses Christa T.’s early hopes and dreams for socialism, and how she differentiates herself from the “fact people” (*Tatsachenmenschen*) and the “chop-chop people” (*Hopp-Hopp-Menschen*), the “fantasy-less” individuals in the “new world” of the GDR (*KombiKOMPAKT-N* 2012, 170). The reading questions then ask students to “speculate about the characteristics and values” of these groups of people “based on the text excerpt” before directing them to “research information about the politics of GDR leaders in the 1960s” in order to “test and refine” their speculations (Ibid., 171). Students are directed back to the literary text to help form their understanding of the historical context, and they are given autonomy in researching the GDR rather than being provided with set viewpoints. The next question then asks students to relate the terms “fact people” and “chop-chop people” to present-day society, which draws connections between the GDR and current society rather than highlighting what separates them.<sup>9</sup> Although more than 30 years separate their publication dates,

<sup>9</sup>The final reading question addresses a larger challenge for today’s reader of GDR literature: “Interpret the novel excerpt based on your previous conclusions as a diagnosis of its time. In doing so, answer the question whether the text has anything to say to the youth of today without prior historical knowledge” (*KombiKompakt-N* 2012, 171).

*Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* and *KombiKOMPAKT-N* both encourage students to engage with aspects of GDR literature and society themselves rather than presenting them with pre-determined, overtly ideological points of view.

The excerpts and reading questions selected by the majority of textbooks understandably emphasize the impacts of GDR socialism, from the school essay topic Christa T.'s students are assigned—"Am I too young to do my part for the development of socialist society?" (*Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen* 2002, 275)—to Christa T.'s thoughts of suicide (*Text und Methoden II* 1992, 239), or her difficulty assimilating to GDR society (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 1991, 390–392; *Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 420).<sup>10</sup> Most textbooks include one or two text-based questions before asking students what they think of the essay topic, what role ideology plays in Christa T.'s "life crisis," or how Christa T. fulfills (or doesn't fulfill) expectations of the "socialist personality." All of these questions are designed to encourage students to think critically about the GDR (and hopefully about the text), but they likewise presume a level of knowledge about the GDR that literature textbooks do not, or cannot, always provide. They also reveal the differing levels of GDR (ideological) critique found in textbooks—a difference that seems more dependent upon in which states textbooks are approved for use rather than when they were published, as we shall see below.

One common means of (re-)framing the social critique of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* while simultaneously claiming Wolf as an exemplary German author is by focusing on the perceived literary value of the novel rather than on its actual content. *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is recognized in several textbooks for its important role in challenging the SED-mandated literary style of socialist realism.<sup>11</sup> This is most noticeably demonstrated in the introductory texts found before excerpts from the novel. Instead of depicting a positive hero, *Kennwort 13* (1994) informs students, Christa Wolf places "an isolated individual struggling for freedom and identity at the center of her novel, breaking radically with the

<sup>10</sup>For those familiar with *Nachdenken über Christa T.* who wonder if the infamous "biting the head off the frog" scene is included, the answer is yes. *Literatur* (1998, Volk und Wissen n.d.) includes a lengthy excerpt. The only reading question devoted exclusively to this text asks students to "describe the impact that the excerpt from Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.* had on you; discuss the image/view of school that it conveys" (299).

<sup>11</sup>Christa Wolf is mentioned in several informational texts about socialist realism itself. Her earlier novel *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963) can be seen as fulfilling the requirements of socialist realism, while her later works challenged them.

official teachings of ‘socialist realism’” (*Kennwort* 13 1994, 219).<sup>12</sup> The same introductory text refers to Wolf as a “modern storyteller” who was challenged by other Party members at the 1969 Authors Congress for both the style and content of the novel. This controversy then led to several developments in GDR literature: “authors attempted to remove themselves from the SED’s claim to power in aesthetic-artistic questions, to depict a critical picture of reality, and to orient themselves to the experimental forms of western literature” (Ibid.).<sup>13</sup> *Texte und Methoden* 11 (1992) introduces the text as an example of “modern narrative technique” that “suspends fable and chronology” (*Texte und Methoden* 11 1992, 238). While *Texte und Methoden* does not directly mention socialist realism, it clearly presents *Nachdenken über Christa T.* as belonging to a different tradition. *Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen* (2002) notes that “the novel was not received without criticism from state censors, because a positive perspective was missing” (*Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen* 2002, 275). This “positive perspective,” usually a positive hero who comes to recognize the superiority of socialism, was a hallmark of socialist realism. Again, the term “socialist realism” itself is not mentioned, but the novel—along with its author Christa Wolf—is situated as symbolizing a break with past literary developments in the GDR and consequently belonging to the wider field of (West) German literature.

While highlighting the importance of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* for its challenge to socialist realist content and style, these three introductory texts remind readers as well of the limitations within GDR socialism that the text itself confronts. That alone is not of particular interest, but these three textbooks (from three separate publishers) are also the only ones to include introductory texts of more than a few sentences, and all three are approved for use in Bayern.<sup>14</sup> This illustrates a more widespread aspect of

<sup>12</sup> *Kennwort* places quotation marks around many terms—not just around “socialist realism.”

<sup>13</sup> *Kennwort* includes *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (and Irmtraud Morgner’s *Kaffeeverkehr*) in a chapter section on female authors in the GDR. One of the reading questions asks students to think of more texts (FRG and GDR) that have a similar “critical basic message” (*kritische Grundaussage*) and what similarities and differences they notice. *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is therefore placed within a larger (East and West) German literary tradition.

<sup>14</sup> *Arbeitsbuch Deutsch* (1979) and *KombiKompakt-N* (2012) each include a one-sentence introduction. *Texte und Methoden* (1992) was additionally approved for use by its “partner state” Sachsen, which adopted many textbooks/approaches from Bayern in the early 1990s.

many post-unification Bavarian textbooks: their overt GDR critique. The critique here is understandable, mentioning the difficulties faced by a protagonist who “resisted socially prescribed roles and patterns of behavior” (*Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen* 2002, 275), or the fact that a true “socialist society” has not yet been achieved (*Kennwort 13* 1994, 219). *Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen* tempers its criticism by stating that “despite certain reservations about the political and social development in the GDR,” Christa Wolf “expressed a critical sympathy in her novels” (*Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen* 2002, 275). *Texte und Methoden 11* (1992) is the harshest, introducing the novel as addressing:

the attempt of self-actualization in an overpowering social order. Those who conform to the larger context pay with the relinquishment of individuality: “obliterating yourself. Being a cog in the wheel” is required. The heroine “fears disappearing without a trace.” In the former GDR a confrontation with the world around you had to become a critical examination of real existing socialism. (*Texte und Methoden 11* 1992, 238–39)

While several phrases here are taken directly from the novel, their condensation into just a few sentences makes the argument more provocative. Particularly in this last example, students are primed to interpret the text from a specific perspective, one that emphasizes the inhumane elements of GDR socialism. Students using other textbooks (without introductory texts or with only brief descriptive introductions) are allowed, even required, to form their own opinions of the text and of the GDR itself. Once again, we see the tension between a focus on literary texts and political context, as well as the muddled boundary of informing students about the GDR context versus inculcating them with ideological views. Regardless of how the GDR is depicted, though, Wolf and *Nachdenken über Christa T.* are portrayed positively.

Two textbooks which include the novel outside of a strictly GDR context underscore Wolf’s status as an exemplary German author while simultaneously demonstrating the power of excerpting. *Passagen* (2001) positions an excerpt in an immediate post-WWII context, while *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010) includes one in the thematic section “Fundamental Terms of Narrative Literature: The Role of the Narrator.” It comes as no surprise that *Blickfeld Deutsch*, which includes a five-sentence excerpt from *Nachdenken über Christa T.* as an example of “neutral narration” (*neutrales Erzählverhalten*), does not make any reference to post-1945 or

GDR literature, instead positioning Wolf's text alongside short excerpts from Thomas Mann and Franz Kafka, who represent twentieth-century German literature writ large.<sup>15</sup> Within the brief excerpt, however, the Marx-Engels-Platz and Alex (anderplatz) (both in East Berlin) are mentioned. As there are many other passages in the novel that would provide suitable examples of neutral narration, it does seem noteworthy that an excerpt which potentially draws attention to the "GDR-ness" of the text is included here. This stands in contrast to *Passagen* (2001), which includes *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in a chapter section about immediate post-WWII Germany together with texts such as Wolfgang Borchert's *Draußen vor der Tür* (*The Man Outside*) and Nelly Sachs's "Chor der Geretteten" (Chorus of the saved). It is the only text in this section published after 1947, and therefore the only text that could have a specific GDR/FRG connection. There is no introductory text, and no mention of the GDR is made in reading questions. Thus it is perfectly plausible that students using *Passagen* could mistakenly believe that *Nachdenken über Christa T.*—one of the definitive GDR novels—is either an immediate post-WWII or a West German work.<sup>16</sup> The GDR context has been nearly completely removed due to the choice of excerpt and the narrow topics of reading questions, presenting this text in an entirely different light than the majority of textbooks do. Both *Passagen* and *Blickfeld Deutsch* acknowledge Wolf's status as an exemplary author by including *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in varied contexts, but these specific excerpts seem to avoid many of the GDR-specific themes at the heart of the novel. They likewise reveal the dilemma that textbook authors seem to face about how much they want to affiliate Wolf and her novels with the GDR.

### Kassandra

While the contemporary GDR setting of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* logically often results in the novel being included in chapters about GDR literature, the opposite is true for *Kassandra*. Set during the Trojan War, it most frequently appears in thematically-based chapters rather than

<sup>15</sup> Beyond the title and author, *Blickfeld Deutsch* does not include any information about the (con)text itself.

<sup>16</sup> The excerpt describes Christa T.'s flight westward during January 1945. Publication dates are listed at the end of each excerpt in *Passagen*, but they are easy to overlook.

post-1945 chapters (six of eight textbooks).<sup>17</sup> This uncoupling from historical context has certain advantages: it allows readers to concentrate on the universal themes of a text, it can lower the affective filter (since there is no expectation that students have command of the historical facts), and it puts FRG and GDR authors on equal footing, as German authors. On the other hand, there are certain texts and topics that cry out for historical contextualization, especially as this is one of the main charges of literary instruction in the *Oberstufe*. With its surface thematization of the Trojan War and its underlying critique of the Cold War and industrialization, *Kassandra* simultaneously invites GDR contextualization as well as rebuffs it. Textbook authors predictably most often choose the latter when including *Kassandra* in thematically-based chapters. Rather than emphasizing any GDR connections that *Kassandra* may have, textbooks take the opportunity to present the text—and by extension its author Wolf—simply as part of the German-language literary canon. The contrast to *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is similarly found when *Kassandra* is included in chapters about GDR literature. While the sample size here is admittedly small (two textbooks), the contrast is worth mentioning. Whereas textbooks frequently use *Nachdenken über Christa T.* as a vehicle for addressing the limitations of socialism in the GDR, *Kassandra* does not lend itself as easily to this discussion. It is obviously a critique of war in general, and of the Cold War in particular, but that critique is not solely directed at the GDR. This forces textbooks to decide whether to downplay the GDR context all together, to acknowledge that both East and West are at fault, or to find another approach for information about the GDR.

The six textbooks which include *Kassandra* in a non-GDR context generally present the text as an example of narrative literature (*Epik*). Four of the six are part of the *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* series (1990, 1999, NRW 2009; Ost 2009). *Standorte Deutsch* (2005) takes a similar approach, using the first and last sentences of *Kassandra* in a chapter section designed to help students analyze narrative texts. *Arbeit mit Texten* (1993) includes the text in a chapter section about contemporary literature, “Women Writing Their Identity: Is War a Man’s Business?” Other than general questions about “patterns of behavior in violent situations”

<sup>17</sup> Several other Wolf texts, such as *Medea. Stimmen*, *Kein Ort. Nirgends* and *Der Schatten eines Traums* are set in pre-GDR timeframes, but they are not included as often in the analyzed textbooks. (*Medea. Stimmen* appears once, as does *Kein Ort. Nirgends*. *Der Schatten eines Traums* appears three times.)



and how to solve the dilemma of war, *Arbeit mit Texten* makes no direct mention of the present day, the Cold War, or the GDR (*Arbeit mit Texten* 1993, 381). Both 2009 versions of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* position the text in its Cold War context, although not in a GDR context, introducing it with the reminder that Wolf “wrote her novella *Kassandra* during the Cold War. She wanted to engage in the political conflict of her time with her portrayal of the Trojan War and took a feminist-pacifist approach” (*TTS-NRW* 2009, 550; *TTS-Ost* 2009, 63). Both textbooks additionally include excerpts from Wolf’s work diary (*Arbeitstagebuch*) about *Kassandra*, in which she mentions the US, USSR, and atomic weapon alerts.<sup>18</sup> This is followed by an informational text about the Cold War, which specifically names the US and USSR as important actors, but does not mention either the FRG or GDR, thus highlighting some elements of the text’s historical context while ignoring others. Students are then asked to “evaluate Christa Wolf’s attempt to raise political consciousness” and to find other examples within the textbook of “politically engaged literature” to help them prepare a “critical opinion” (*TTS-NRW* 2009, 557; *TTS-Ost* 2009, 70). The only difference between the two textbooks is found in the reading questions after the *Kassandra* excerpt itself; whereas *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* includes questions about the extent to which literary texts can “develop a political effect,” *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* has students identify an aspect of the text that caught their attention (such as war, masculinity, etc.) and take notes for a written response (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 63; *TTS-NRW* 2009, 552). This is typical for *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW*, which often seems more reluctant than the Eastern German version to address controversial or complicated political issues.<sup>19</sup> In both textbooks, however, *Kassandra* is presented as a 1980s Cold War text devoid of any specific GDR (or even German) context. One can only speculate whether Christa Wolf would have been satisfied with this attempt to “raise political consciousness.”

While keeping their attention on narrative literature, the earlier versions of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (1990, 1999) and *Standorte Deutsch* (2005) all at least hint at the connection between *Kassandra* and the

<sup>18</sup>In May 1982 Christa Wolf held a series of lectures in the FRG at the University of Frankfurt in which she described the genesis of *Kassandra*. The lectures, which included excerpts from her work diary, were published in 1983 (FRG) as *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Kassandra*. The GDR version was *Kassandra. Vier Vorlesungen. Eine Erzählung*.

<sup>19</sup>One related example: *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW* does not include Wolf’s text *Was bleibt* or any information about the *Literaturstreit* (discussed later in this chapter).

GDR. *Standorte Deutsch* is the most subtle and easiest to overlook: on the page before the first- and last-sentence *Kassandra* excerpt (which is paired with an excerpt from Jurek Becker's *Jakob der Lügner*—another GDR text), students are informed that “the fascination of the narrative arc from the beginning to the end of a text is also clear in the major novellas and novels of authors who began their careers in the former GDR, careers which were later esteemed in reunified Germany” (*Standorte Deutsch* 2005, 95). A careful reader would know that Christa Wolf is, or at least was, a GDR author, but that is the only contextualization provided. The phrase “began their careers” is not untrue, but it does imply that both Wolf and Becker spent the majority of their careers *not* in the GDR, subtly separating these authors and texts from other GDR literature.<sup>20</sup> *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (1999) potentially provides GDR context, assigning students to “familiarize yourself with the content and author of the three novels in literary encyclopedias (i.e. *Kindlers Literaturlexikon*), author encyclopedias and literary histories” (*TTS* 1999, 142). The likelihood that students would find some GDR references is fairly high, assuming this question is actually assigned. The earliest edition of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (1990) includes an excerpt from *Kassandra* and two other novels from which students are told to choose one novel to read in its entirety.<sup>21</sup> Each excerpt is followed by a brief contextual synopsis (here the Cassandra myth) and a short author biography. This paragraph-long text includes the most information about Wolf of any of the three textbooks in the context of *Kassandra*, including Wolf's membership in the SED, the political conflicts she faced (especially after Wolf Biermann's expatriation), and her many literary successes and prizes. There are no follow-up questions about the text or the biography, so students and teachers are left to make of them what they will. All three textbooks (potentially) acknowledge some level of connection to the GDR while likewise exemplifying the frequent decision of textbook authors to downplay the historical context of texts and authors presented in thematically-focused chapters.

The two textbooks which include *Kassandra* in chapters about GDR literature, *Texte und Methoden* 13 (1994) and *Deutschbuch* 12 (2010),

<sup>20</sup>This statement more accurately describes Becker than Wolf. Becker's support of Wolf Biermann resulted in his removal from the SED and the leadership of the Writers Union. In 1977 Becker resigned from the Writers Union completely and was allowed to move to the FRG. (See Müller-Enbergs et al. 2010).

<sup>21</sup>The other novels are Wolfgang Koeppen's *Der Tod in Rom* (1954) and Max Frisch's *Homo Faber* (1957).

provide unique examples of the text-context spectrum. Because *Kassandra* is not overtly about the GDR, reading questions generally do not connect the text to its GDR background. Informational texts and additional texts by Wolf, however, are used to accentuate the reception of her novel, the response of the SED, and Wolf's popularity. Wolf's role as a critical GDR author is created less by *Kassandra* than by other elements of its presentation in textbooks. It is worth noting that both textbooks are published by the same publisher (Cornelson) and are approved for use in Bayern, and neither of these textbooks include any GDR authors (besides Brecht) outside their chronological/GDR context.<sup>22</sup> In *Texte und Methoden 13*, *Kassandra* appears in the chapter "The Present," which begins with an extensive informative text "Main Features of the Epoch" providing an overview of FRG and GDR literary history 1949–1989. More than 30 pages before the excerpt from *Kassandra*, students read that "in the 1980s, works by GDR authors were read with more interest and attention than in previous decades," echoing the attitude found in several other textbooks of popularity in the West as the measure of literary value (*Texte und Methoden 13* 1994, 252). Christa Wolf was "especially esteemed," and her figure of the prophetess Cassandra "addressed sociopolitical" issues. The textbook then includes a brief quotation from Wolf's Third Frankfurt Poetics Lecture,<sup>23</sup> in which she criticizes the "absurd development of modern industrial society, the false god and fetish of all governments, that turns on its architects, users and defenders" (Ibid.). This is followed by the statement: "these sentences were removed by the censors in the GDR edition of the Lecture." Wolf is presented here as a GDR voice speaking truth to power, and being censored by that power, but finding recognition in the West. In contrast, the questions about the text excerpt itself are very text-centric: students are to inform themselves about the Trojan War and are asked "how typical aspects of a pre-war situation are portrayed in an ancient setting" (Ibid., 290). *Deutschbuch 12* places *Kassandra* in an extensive chapter on "Literature in East and West 1950–1989" after a section on "Stages of Literature in East Germany."<sup>24</sup> Several excerpts from *Kassandra* and Wolf's work diary appear in a special "Text Window:

<sup>22</sup> As previously mentioned, *Texte und Methoden* was also used in Sachsen. The publication date and the early post-unification cooperation between Bayern and Sachsen both suggest that the textbook was (largely) developed in Bayern.

<sup>23</sup> See footnote 18 for more information.

<sup>24</sup> Even the use of the term "Ostdeutschland" (rather than DDR) and "Westdeutschland" (rather than Bundesrepublik Deutschland) hint at a conservative ideological stance.

Christa Wolf's *Kassandra*." Again, the majority of reading questions are standard comprehension and literary analysis questions, and the rest simply ask students to hypothesize about "present-day references" (at the time of writing) in certain passages and the possibility of their "transfer to current political situations and events" (*Deutschbuch 12* 2010, 272). The GDR context is provided by three book reviews of *Kassandra*—two positive assessments from West German newspapers and one scathing review from the leading GDR literary magazine *Sinn und Form*. Students are directed to analyze the three texts and to reflect on the "reception of the novel in East and West" (Ibid., 274). The plot of *Kassandra* may not seem directly connected to the GDR, but the novel's reception clearly is depicted as such by these two textbooks. Once again, Wolf is lifted up as an exemplary author while the SED/GDR are critiqued.

The inclusion, positioning, and presentation of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and *Kassandra* demonstrate several important aspects of Wolf's portrayal in textbooks. Both texts are included much more frequently than Wolf's earliest bestseller *Der geteilte Himmel*, which still adhered to the tenets of socialist realism, directly or indirectly signaling that they are considered the more exemplary texts. Textbooks also make strategic use of excerpting with *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, generally to accentuate its inherent critique of the socialist system in the GDR. This GDR critique is continued in the reading questions which follow the text. When positioned in non-GDR chapters, both texts are (ostensibly) "freed" from their GDR-ness, and even in GDR chapters, reading questions for *Kassandra* do not emphasize the GDR and its literature. These tendencies appear to be more driven by differences in federal states than by change over time. What is apparent is the sharply differing foci of thematically based chapters and post-45/GDR chapters on literary text versus historical context. Regardless of the level of GDR focus and/or critique found in individual textbooks, however, Wolf is presented as an (East) German author worth reading.

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Informational texts, timelines, and author biographies similarly play an important role in creating the textbook image of Wolf. Informational texts and timelines are remarkably consistent in their depiction of Wolf as an exemplary author whose works challenged socialist realism and the limits of the SED regime, situating her similarly to Brecht and in marked

contrast to Becher and Seghers. It is in author biographies, where the facts about Wolf's life as a Party member and the desire to portray an acceptable image of this exemplary author appear to collide, that critical attitudes about the GDR are most subtly yet powerfully revealed. Taken as a whole, these texts about Wolf show the lengths to which some textbooks will go to present Wolf as an author on the right side of German (literary) history.

Of the seven textbooks which mention Wolf in informational texts and/or timelines about 1960s GDR literature and culture, three specifically position her writing as a rejection of socialist realism.<sup>25</sup> Both the 1991 and 2003 versions of *Blickfeld Deutsch* mention Wolf in their multi-paragraph informational texts "Socialist Realism," including her as an example of authors who rejected the cookie-cutter portrayal of positive protagonists demanded by socialist realism, instead "placing greater emphasis on a nuanced portrayal of individuals in all of their inconsistencies" (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 1991, 386; *Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 413).<sup>26</sup> The literary value of Wolf's writing is thus plainly established here. In its "Post-War and GDR" overview, *Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen* informs students that GDR authors in the early- and mid-1960s "began to detach themselves from the all too definitive ideological guidelines of socialist realism," and that "Christa Wolf's novel *Der geteilte Himmel* is exemplary for the prose literature of the 1960s that also gains recognition in other (non-socialist) countries" (*Deutsche Dichtung* 1989, 688). This connection of turning away from socialist realism and popularity in the West effectively establishes Wolf as an important author for all Germans, not just for loyal SED members. This realization is followed by a reminder that Wolf's detachment from socialist realism does not mean a detachment from socialist values, as the "heroine in Wolf's novel, after a temporary 'endangerment', experiences a stabilization due to her socialist stance" (Ibid.).

<sup>25</sup> Informational texts frequently include Wolf in a handful of contexts: socialist realism, literature of arrival (*Ankunftsliteratur*), Wolf Biermann's expatriation, and most recently, events surrounding German reunification. My discussion here will highlight the first two, interconnected, topics, as they most obviously reveal how textbooks position even Wolf's early writings as worthwhile literature amidst formulaic socialist realist works. Some textbooks remind students that Wolf's 1963 novel *Der geteilte Himmel* (*Divided Heaven*) was a reckoning with the proscribed literary style and not with the socialist system itself, but in general, Wolf and her novel are predominantly presented as exemplary and important.

<sup>26</sup> Hermann Kant, Günter Kunert, Volker Braun and Ulrich Plenzdorf are included as examples in both versions. Günter de Bruyn is mentioned in 2003.

Wolf and her protagonists were still very much a part of the socialist system, and textbooks acknowledge this. Wolf's writing may have grown more critical over time, but even this early novel is portrayed as worthwhile GDR literature—especially in comparison to socialist realist works.

The remaining four textbooks present Wolf in the context of *Ankunftsliteratur*, or literature of arrival, and while all of them portray Wolf in a positive light, they simultaneously illustrate the differences in tone found in textbook descriptions of the GDR (literary) system itself. *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* (1999) includes a very brief description of *Ankunftsliteratur* in a timeline of literary styles, describing it as “thematizing life in the developed socialist society” and including Wolf in a list of several authors associated with the style (TTS 1999, 325). In contrast, the earlier edition of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* provides a bit more commentary and contextualization—largely neutral or positive, as is typical of this earliest group of textbooks. It informs students that this “young generation of authors, raised in the spirit of socialism, grappled with the flaws and shortcomings of reality in comparison to the strived-for utopia,” but that this critique remained “in solidarity; it did not attack the system on principle and in its entirety” (TTS 1990, 263). This allows Wolf and her writing to be presented as challenging the SED while not distorting the facts of Wolf's biography. *Texte, Themen und Strukturen* 1990 additionally situates Wolf in a positive light by mentioning that West German readers were interested in these socially critical works, “triggered by the politicization process of literature in their own country,” and that Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* “reached bestseller-like print run numbers in the West” (Ibid.). Once again, popularity in the FRG is viewed as an important indicator of literary value.

In the newest generation of textbooks, *Deutsch 12* (2010) strives for a decidedly neutral tone, explaining that the term *Ankunftsliteratur* “refers overall to the early years of the GDR, in which citizens were forced to grapple with the socialist system,” and listing Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* as an example of the style (*Deutsch 12* 2010, 253–254). *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010) includes the most obvious GDR critique in its description, informing students that “citizens who, with optimism and personal investment, take part in the establishment of a just society and work toward advancements in ‘socialist production’, break under the dominance of the ‘plan’, the oppression of the different-minded, and the aspiration to personal happiness” (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 415). The GDR is presented here as a cruel system that crushed its most promising citizens. Wolf's *Der geteilte*

*Himmel* is mentioned as “also showing what moved this young generation” (Ibid.). Although the four textbooks reveal differences in their descriptions of literature of arrival, and of 1960s GDR society, they all position Wolf and *Der geteilte Himmel* as worthwhile reading.

Author biographies present the greatest challenge to post-unification textbooks striving to present a palatable portrayal of Wolf to a post-unification German audience. As has been demonstrated, Wolf’s writing is widely claimed as being of literary importance. But how do textbooks present the decidedly pro-GDR aspects of Wolf’s biography—her membership in the SED, her leadership role in the SED-controlled Writers Union, and her activity 1959–1962 as an unofficial collaborator (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeiterin*, IM) for the Stasi? Several textbooks, often those specifically approved for use in Bayern, choose to omit much of this information, while textbooks used in Sachsen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern acknowledge and rationalize Wolf’s actions. In general, the harsher the GDR critique found throughout a textbook, the less acknowledgement of Wolf’s involvement in the GDR system appears in her biographical texts. It seems that the (West) German poster child for GDR literature must be removed, or rescued, from her GDR context.

This reluctance to sully Wolf’s reputation can be illustrated by the fact that eight of the ten biographies directly mention her SED membership, but only four of them mention her cooperation with the Stasi, with only one textbook actually using the term *Informelle Mitarbeiterin* (IM).<sup>27</sup> One could argue that 40 years of SED membership outweigh three years of informal observation for the Stasi, especially given the brevity of many biographical entries.<sup>28</sup> However, several of the textbooks which omit Wolf’s IM activities do make room to mention her many literary prizes and her protest of Wolf Biermann’s expatriation—both of which serve to

<sup>27</sup> SED membership: *Blickfeld Deutsch* 1991, 2003, 2010; *Deutsch 12, KombiKompakt-Bayern, KombiKompakt-N; Texte, Themen und Strukturen—Ost* and *NRW*. Stasi cooperation: *Kennwort 13, Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 2010; *KombiKompakt-N* (uses term IM). *Literatur* (Volk und Wissen) is the only textbook not to directly mention Wolf’s SED membership or her work with the Stasi.

<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that very few biographical texts about West German authors make any mention of their Party affiliation. One notable exception is Günter Grass, who actively supported the SPD and appeared at campaign events in the 1960s and 1970s. Textbooks frequently mention political affiliation and activities of GDR authors, reflecting (and shaping) the sharply differing societal attitudes toward the political systems of the FRG and GDR.

make her more attractive to a post-GDR audience. The following examples from two concurrent editions of *KombiKOMPAKT* make this tension clear.

*KombiKOMPAKT 12*, used in Bayern, includes a brief biographical paragraph about Wolf that highlights Wolf's opposition to the SED-controlled system over her support of it. It acknowledges her SED membership (and that she was a candidate of the Central Committee), but then immediately states that Wolf was "at times in conflict with the official cultural politics of the GDR" (*KombiKOMPAKT 12* 2012, 91). Wolf's work until 1962 as "research associate at the Writers Union"—a job only granted to the Party faithful—is paired with a note that she had been a self-employed author since then, emphasizing Wolf's independence from the SED. Her role as "co-initiator of the protest against the expatriation of Wolf Biermann" is mentioned, along with her winning of the (West German) Georg-Büchner-Prize in 1980. The paragraph ends with the statement that Wolf's writings "address contemporary questions, the difficulties of a divided Germany, the conflict between society and the individual and gender conflicts," positioning Wolf as a writer for all Germans (*Ibid.*). A bare minimum of information about Wolf's engagement with the SED regime is far outweighed by facts likely deemed more positive by Bavarian officials and textbook writers.

*KombiKOMPAKT-N*, used in the former GDR states of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen, presents a more detailed and somewhat more critical portrayal of Wolf. Instead of placing her on a pedestal, this version of the textbook describes Wolf's life to an audience with (potentially) more understanding of and sympathy for the complicated personal and political choices faced by GDR citizens. In two paragraphs, it mentions Wolf joining the SED "in 1949 after completing her Abitur," as well as her 1959 recruitment "by the Ministry for State Security (MfS) as an 'Unofficial Collaborator' (IM)," adding that "the Stasi ended the collaboration in 1962" (*KombiKOMPAKT-N* 2012, 170).<sup>29</sup> It is the only textbook to actually use the instantly-recognizable term IM rather than simply saying that Wolf worked "informally" or "occasionally" for the Stasi. The textbook then notes that "from the mid-1960s Christa Wolf was observed herself (in 1993 she published her IM-file under the title *Akteneinsicht Christa Wolf*)." Providing students with information about Wolf's

<sup>29</sup>This biographical text does not mention that Wolf was a candidate for the Central Committee of the SED.



dealings with the Stasi—both as informant and as victim—may challenge her positive image, but it allows for more informed and nuanced discussion of the author and her works as well. Wolf's image is then further bolstered by reminders of her “public criticism of the leaders of the GDR” and her status—“also internationally—as one of the most important German authors.” Although Wolf Biermann is not directly mentioned, Christa Wolf's 1977 “suspension of service” from the executive board of the Writers Union is an obvious result of her activism on his behalf, subtly but effectively underscoring the oppressive nature of SED politics (Ibid.). Rather than shying away from all but the most necessary mentions of the GDR, the Eastern German version of *KombiKOMPACT* presents a fuller depiction of Wolf's life and choices within the SED-controlled system. Ultimately, Wolf is still portrayed as an exemplary author.

As texts *about* Wolf rather than *by* her, informational texts and author biographies very clearly reflect the desire by post-unification textbooks to position Wolf as an important twentieth-century German author. Many textbooks do this by presenting even her earliest works as a break with the SED-controlled literary style of socialist realism, and several author biographies continue the task of separating Wolf from her SED context by omitting potentially problematic aspects of her biography. Indeed, the more invested a textbook is in overall GDR critique, the less likely it is to acknowledge Wolf's role within the SED-controlled cultural apparatus of the country. Textbooks used more than two decades after reunification still reveal notable differences between editions for Western and Eastern German states, suggesting that the “wall in the head” still plays a role in Germany today.<sup>30</sup>

### THE CHRISTA WOLF DEBATE (*LITERATURSTREIT*)

Christa Wolf's reputation as an exemplary and critical GDR author was deeply shaken in 1990 with the publication of her novella *Was bleibt*. The text, which Wolf initially wrote in 1979, when she had already been under observation by the Stasi for a decade, portrays a single day in the life of an East German author under such observation as well. While the work is

<sup>30</sup>The phrase “wall in the head” (*Mauer im Kopf*) is often associated with Peter Schneider's 1982 novel *Der Mauerspringer* (*The Wall Jumper*), and was frequently used during and after German reunification. Rather than living with the physical Berlin Wall as a symbol of division, Germans were now confronted with a mental wall which divided them.

categorized as fiction, the biographical similarities between the unnamed protagonist and Christa Wolf were too tantalizing to ignore. Several days before the publication of *Was bleibt*, Ulrich Greiner (*DIE ZEIT*) and Frank Schirmacher (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) published scathing reviews—less of the novella than of Christa Wolf herself. Thus began the cultural debate known as the *Literaturstreit* (literary controversy).<sup>31</sup> While ostensibly about the value and role of GDR literature after the collapse of the country, the *Literaturstreit* was really more a (West) German reckoning with the political and personal decisions of GDR authors, a “fundamental skepticism toward any form of engagement in the GDR” (Herrmann and Horstkotte 2016, 18) and a way of putting the GDR (and its literature) in its place by claiming “the power of defining culture” (*kulturelle Definitionsmacht*) (Emmerich 1996, 462).<sup>32</sup> Christa Wolf and *Was bleibt* became the lightning rods for the entire controversy, inspiring both biting criticism and passionate defense which did not simply fall along geographic borders.<sup>33</sup>

For textbooks, the *Literaturstreit* presents significant challenges to their long-established positive portrayal of Wolf. Do they ignore the controversy, turn their backs on a previously “exemplary” author, or defend her writing and her political choices? While textbook authors choose different approaches, one important commonality is apparent: textbooks stand by Wolf. Just as we have observed in informational texts and author biographies, even textbooks which harshly critique GDR politics and society are noticeably protective of Wolf and her reputation. She is intimately

<sup>31</sup> Other commonly used terms are the *deutsch-deutscher Literaturstreit* or the *Christa-Wolf-Debatte*. Some readers may be familiar with the *Historikerstreit* (historians’ dispute) in the late 1980s, in which the role of the Holocaust in forming (West) German national identity was debated. Both *Streite* centered around (re)interpretations of twentieth-century German history.

<sup>32</sup> To some extent the *Literaturstreit* was a reckoning with the role of West German literature, but this development came later and was much less accusatory (see Wittek 49). GDR literature is not the only area of the creative arts to become embroiled in cultural disputes after reunification. Anja Tack (2021) analyzes the ongoing debates about the legacy of GDR painting, revealing that these debates mask a much larger discussion about the legacy and value of the GDR itself.

<sup>33</sup> For more information about the *Literaturstreit*, see Deiritz and Krauss 1991, Anz 1995, Wittek 1997, Brockmann 1999, Herrmann and Horstkotte 2016. *The GDR Bulletin* devoted its entire Spring 1991 issue (17.1) to the debate. For an insightful analysis of the gendered aspect of the *Literaturstreit*, see Kuhn 1994.

connected to the GDR, but somehow not completely “of” the GDR—much like Brecht. This status was threatened by the *Literaturstreit*, but textbooks devote considerable energy to minimizing the negative impact of the controversy by ignoring, contextualizing, diffusing, and at times challenging it. Wolf’s status as the West German paragon of East German literature remains secure.

With a publication date of 1990 and its GDR-centric subject matter, *Was bleibt* poses some challenges for textbooks in addition to the *Literaturstreit*. One of the important functions of literary instruction in the *Oberstufe* is literary history, so less textbook space is devoted to current literature. This may explain the fact that *Was bleibt* is mentioned as a recommended text in the 1991 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern curriculum, but does not appear in any of the examined textbooks until 2009 (*Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost*).<sup>34</sup> By 2015, the majority of textbooks include chapters or chapter sections about literature after 1989, but the texts selected generally thematize the *Wende* itself or life in a newly reunified Germany.<sup>35</sup> In fact, only *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010) includes *Was bleibt* in its “Literature after 1989” chapter. Initially written in 1979, the novella is caught in an unusual situation of being both too current and too dated.

It is important to note that when *Was bleibt* finally does appear in textbooks in use in 2015, it is only a part of the overall portrayal of Wolf and her works. Seven of the eight textbooks include texts by Wolf (all but *P.A.U.L. D.*), with 12 unique texts appearing a total of 23 times. Half of the textbooks contain excerpts of *Was bleibt*, and all four include additional texts by Wolf, ensuring that students do not exclusively associate Wolf with her most controversial text. Only one textbook (*KombiKOMPAKT 12*) which does not include an excerpt from *Was bleibt* mentions the *Literaturstreit*, which shows that textbooks are

<sup>34</sup>The 1991 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern curriculum suggests reading *Was bleibt* in connection with the topic “Contending with Successful Communication and Disruptions to Communication.” *Was bleibt* is mentioned once in *Blickfeld Deutsch 2003*, as a single sentence in its three-paragraph biography of Christa Wolf. “The narration *Was bleibt* (1990) depicts the observation of Christa Wolf (1969–1989) by the Stasi and sparked a large literary controversy which also thematized the informal cooperation of the author with the Stasi (1959–1962)” (*Blickfeld Deutsch 2003*, 420).

<sup>35</sup>Six of the eight textbooks include a chapter/section specifically about literature after 1989. *P.A.U.L. D.* and *KombiKompakt-N* simply add this time period to other chapters, such as “Literature and Language from 1945 to the present” (*KombiKompakt-N*).

predominantly concerned with presenting Wolf as an exemplary author, not as a figure of controversy.<sup>36</sup> The textbooks used in 2015 which do choose to address the controversy often downplay its impact on Wolf's reputation by contextualizing her pre-1989 choices or by challenging the narrative of the *Literaturstreit* itself. The following is a closer look at these textbooks.

### Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost *and* Deutschbuch 12

*Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* and *Deutschbuch 12* reveal the contrasts resulting from differing priorities and goals in Bayern and Eastern Germany. Both textbooks are published by Cornelsen and share members of their editorial teams, but they take very different approaches in their efforts to preserve Wolf's reputation.<sup>37</sup> *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* completely ignores the *Literaturstreit* while *Deutschbuch 12* confronts it head-on. What both textbooks have in common is their acknowledgement of the challenges and limitations GDR authors faced. *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* accomplishes this by including the opening paragraphs of *Was bleibt* in its "Literature from 1945 to the Present" chapter, in the section "Politicization of Literature and New Subjectivity, Between Critique and Conformity," choosing to contextualize the excerpt in the time of its initial writing rather than of its publication. This section also includes Biermann's "Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus" (discussed in Chap. 5). A brief introductory text informs students that Wolf is "describing an episode from the end of the 1970s, when she was observed for weeks by the Stasi in East Berlin. She wrote the text in summer 1979; a revised version was not published until 1990" (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 425). While the conflation of the fictional narrator with Wolf herself is rather unfortunate (albeit

<sup>36</sup>This occurs in a chapter section on GDR literature in an enrichment activity: "Find out about the German-German Literary Controversy, which flared up after unification and the publication of Christa Wolf's "Was bleibt." Describe the central points of view" (*KombiKOMPAKT 12* 2012, 111).

<sup>37</sup>The main editors of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* are Margret Fingerhut and Bernd Schurf. Schurf and Kurt Finkenzeller are the main editors of *Deutschbuch 12*. (Along with Andrea Wagener, Schurf is also the editor of *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW*, with contributions from Margret Fingerhut. *TTS-NRW* does not include *Was bleibt*.) *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost*, approved for use in Sachsen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, was published by Cornelsen in cooperation with Volk und Wissen Verlag. Volk und Wissen published nearly all textbooks in the GDR and became an imprint of Cornelsen in 1991 (see Volk und Wissen n.d.).

common), the emphasis obviously is on Stasi observation and the dangers of political non-conformity in the GDR as described in the novella. The reading questions after the text excerpt extend this topic, asking students to “describe the atmosphere” in the text excerpt, or to “examine the perspective” and the role that verb tenses play in creating it (Ibid.). The most compelling question asks students which of the protagonist’s actions they find “reasonable” and to explain the others—possibly an attempt to help students understand the psychological impact of being under observation. The three questions mark the end of the *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* inclusion of *Was bleibt*, making it the only textbook to include the novella and not to mention the *Literaturstreit*. *Was bleibt* is presented exclusively in its GDR context, and Wolf is portrayed as an author daring to speak truth to power. This is unsurprising considering that the textbook is designed specifically for states in the former GDR; via Wolf they can (re) assert the worth of East German literature.

*Deutschbuch 12* defends Wolf’s reputation in a starkly different way, by providing the most information of any textbook about the *Literaturstreit* itself. It positions *Was bleibt* in a special chapter section “Reception: The German-German Literary Controversy,” immediately cueing in students to the context surrounding the text. This is underscored by the introductory text:

Christa Wolf’s novella—with the title *Was bleibt* apparently taking stock of things—was released on June 5, 1990. Several days earlier, however, a literary controversy began in the feature pages; a controversy that extended far beyond the text itself and developed into a general controversy about the assessment of literature in a formerly divided Germany. (*Deutschbuch 12* 2010, 276)

The text excerpt from *Was bleibt* (which is similar to the one in *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost*) is followed by two text-based questions and then the assignment to “inform yourself from the following timeline about the cause of the German-German *Literaturstreit*. Establish connections and contradictions between the different dates in the timeline and take notes on a nuanced evaluation of Christa Wolf’s actions” (Ibid.). The timeline covers the years 1959–1993 and centers on Wolf’s political activities and interactions with the SED system. Students are informed that Wolf worked as an informant, but was let go by the Stasi because she didn’t have the necessary “love’ for our duties.” The Stasi’s later

observation of Wolf and her husband is mentioned (41 volumes worth!), as is her resignation from the executive board of the Writers Union in the wake of the Biermann affair. The last entries (1992, 1993) concern Christa Wolf's Stasi file and her public acknowledgement that she worked as an informant from 1959 to 1962. Whether students are able to develop a "nuanced evaluation" of Wolf's actions is questionable, but there is a clear effort here to show Wolf as someone who both benefitted from and was victimized by the GDR state and its institutions. As with any author, Wolf is fallible, but her literary and personal triumphs and failures are contextualized.

It is only after students have engaged with *Was bleibt* and the timeline that they are confronted with excerpts from four of the most well-known newspaper reviews that unleashed the *Literaturstreit*—two that are extremely critical (Schirmacher, Greiner) and two that are more sympathetic (Dieckmann, Wittstock). Students are asked to summarize the main arguments of each and to compare the reviews with their previous "evaluation," as well as to explain some of the terms commonly used during the *Literaturstreit* to criticize Wolf and other GDR authors: "state author" (*Staatsdichterin*), "literature of approval" (*Anerkennungsliteratur*), "ideological aesthetics" (*Gesinnungsästhetik*) (*Deutschbuch 12* 2020, 278). *Deutschbuch 12* is the only textbook to include more than two reviews of *Was bleibt* and is undoubtedly invested in helping students think through both sides of the controversy. By providing so much context, it encourages students to develop a more nuanced view of GDR literature and of Wolf herself. Often extremely critical of the GDR state, *Deutschbuch 12* goes to great effort to establish some distance between the system and Wolf. The approach is a marked contrast to *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost*, but both textbooks use contextualization to protect Wolf's reputation as an exemplary GDR author.

### Deutsch 12 and Blickfeld Deutsch

While *Deutsch 12* (Bayern) and *Blickfeld Deutsch* (Sachsen) similarly reveal initial differences in style and pedagogical approach in their presentation of *Was bleibt*, they share an underlying tone of diffusing and challenging the narrative of the *Literaturstreit*. *Deutsch 12* includes *Was bleibt* at the end of its chapter on GDR literature, in the section "*Was bleibt*: A Literary Controversy—Literary Argument by Means of Texts," setting up an emphasis on literature. *Blickfeld Deutsch* positions the novella excerpt in a chapter about post-1989 literature, in the section "*Was*

*bleibt?*—Discovering and Evaluating the Fate of an Author in the Context of the *Wende*,” signaling greater focus on Wolf herself. As shall be seen, however, both textbooks also gently challenge some of the strident criticism of Wolf so commonly heard during the *Literaturstreit*. They acknowledge the controversy, but diffuse its impact, thereby maintaining their positive portrayal of Wolf.

In an understated way, *Deutsch 12* already begins its challenge of the *Literaturstreit* in a brief introductory paragraph before the novella excerpt, by acknowledging that the controversy was less about Christa Wolf than about the legacy of GDR cultural achievements as a whole:

Christa Wolf's novella *Was bleibt* was published in 1990 with the note that it had been written in 1979, and it unleashed a fierce literary controversy. Reviews from Frank Schirrmacher in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and from Ulrich Greiner in DIE ZEIT are the beginning of this confrontation about the manner and scope of coming to terms with the GDR cultural establishment. The novella was viewed as the unsuccessful attempt by an East German state author and propagandist of the socialist system to present herself after the fact as a victim of the regime. (*Deutsch 12* 2010, 264)

The mention of harsh reviews—by (male) West German journalists in West German papers—is a reminder of the larger context of the controversy, and the phrase “the novella was viewed as” subtly implies that other viewpoints were and are possible, that Wolf herself was a “victim of the regime” and not a “propagandist.” Without directly saying that Wolf was unfairly the focal point of a larger struggle over who had *Definitionsmacht*, *Deutsch 12* does separate her (writings) from the controversy.

This viewpoint is fortified by the way in which students interact with *Was bleibt*—as a text to be read, understood, and analyzed in all of its literary aspects.<sup>38</sup> Students are directed to pay close attention to content and narrative technique, and to the interplay of the two. It is only then that students are presented with a quotation from Ulrich Greiner: “‘*Was bleibt* calls itself a novella, and therefore is supposedly literature. Fiction that we shouldn't confuse with a factual report.’ Based on this opinion of Wolf's text, discuss the right to artistically grapple with injustice experienced in a dictatorship” (Ibid., 267). This is followed by a longer excerpt from Greiner's review and specific tasks for students, including identifying

<sup>38</sup>The excerpt contains passages from the first several pages of the novella, largely portraying the narrator's reaction to being observed by the *Stasi*.

Greiner's main critiques of the novella and of Wolf herself. Students are then to produce a written analysis of Greiner's quotation, drawing on the excerpts from the novella and Greiner's review. Having first interacted with the novella and then with Greiner's polemical review, it is fairly likely that students will be more supportive of Wolf than they are of Greiner. *Deutsch 12* thus includes the *Literaturstreit* while simultaneously pushing back on its narrative and maintaining a positive portrayal of Wolf as an important GDR author.

*Blickfeld Deutsch* diffuses the impact of the *Literaturstreit* by presenting *Was bleibt* together with Wolf's November 8, 1989, speech on GDR TV and a 2005 interview she did with DIE ZEIT in which she addresses the *Literaturstreit* at length.<sup>39</sup> Rather than reading about Wolf, students read her firsthand thoughts about the events of 1989, the publication of *Was bleibt*, and the ensuing controversy. The section begins with an informational text about "double historicity" which reminds students that "when analyzing literary and other texts, it is important to keep in mind that text and analyst are generally located in different historical and cultural contexts" (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 459). The informational text is specifically relating to Christa Wolf's TV appearance, but the reminder that "a younger reader who has not experienced the GDR and the time of the *Wende* must read the text very carefully and make note of everything that irritates or surprises them, and thoroughly inform themselves about the historical background" can apply to all of the texts in this section (Ibid.). This attention to historical context subtly encourages students to view the *Literaturstreit* within the larger picture of its time and of Wolf's long and prize-crowned career.

Much like the other three textbooks which include the novella, *Blickfeld Deutsch* selects an excerpt which thematizes *Stasi* observation. Initial reading questions ask students to examine how this is reflected linguistically and to consider the mental consequences of being under such observation. The final question acknowledges the "autobiographical nature" of the text, asking students to "discuss Christa Wolf's decision not to leave the GDR despite these experiences" and to use Wolf's TV speech in their deliberations (Ibid., 465). Wolf is clearly portrayed as an author who defended the idea of the GDR but who suffered under its reality as well.

<sup>39</sup>In her TV appearance, Christa Wolf urged East Germans to remain in the GDR, and defectors to return. Rather than abandon the GDR, they should help build upon the changes that were already taking place. The text appeared the next day (9 November 1989) on the front page of the *Neues Deutschland* newspaper.



It is worth noting that in the margin directly next to the *Was bleibt* excerpt, a brief biographical text about Wolf mentions her “informal cooperation with the *Stasi* (1959–1962)” as a topic of the *Literaturstreit*. Wolf’s entanglement with the GDR state is acknowledged, but not highlighted; her decades-long role as critical author is emphasized more.

*Blickfeld Deutsch* continues its diffusion (or perhaps defusing) of the *Literaturstreit* by excerpting two newspaper reviews of *Was bleibt* with markedly different arguments, as well as a 2005 interview with Wolf herself. The opening lines of each review make the author’s position clear to students: Ulrich Greiner claims “Now that’s something: The state author of the GDR was supposedly under observation by the State Security System of the GDR?,” while Volker Hage argues “There’s nothing of which to accuse her” (Ibid., 465–66). Students are urged to examine the different positions, to create a list of arguments for and against, and to discuss the positions as a class. The controversy is addressed in an even-handed way, with student sympathies probably lying with Wolf rather than her critics. In a real-life example of “double historicity,” today’s students likely struggle to fully grasp the venom and hubris which at times characterized the *Literaturstreit*, as some West German cultural elites sought to assign GDR literature and authors a position of inferiority, mere state propaganda, and lost relevance. The impact of the controversy has decreased over time, and Wolf’s reputation as an important GDR author remains. This position is bolstered in Wolf’s interview with *DIE ZEIT*, in which Wolf reflects on her early cooperation with the *Stasi*, the pain and confusion of the *Literaturstreit*, and saying farewell to her dreams for the GDR. Rather than reading a text about Wolf, or a literary text by her, students read Wolf’s personal thoughts about her own life experiences. The *Literaturstreit* is part of her life, but it does not single-handedly define her work or her reputation.

The *Literaturstreit* very publicly and profoundly challenged Wolf’s status as a respected (GDR) author in immediate post-unification Germany. The nearly two-decade delay in its inclusion in textbooks, as well as the strategies these textbooks use to minimize its impact on Wolf’s reputation, reflect her importance in the textbook canon. For textbook authors, Wolf symbolizes not only the best of GDR literature, but some of the best of post-1945 German literature. What remains is a consistently positive portrayal of Christa Wolf.

## THE GÜNTER GRASS DEBATE?

The potential for controversy surrounding authors long lauded by textbooks is not unique to Christa Wolf. While the *Literaturstreit* was largely fanned by a West German re-evaluation of GDR literature and culture, Wolf's personal choices—and the way she publicly addressed them—played an important role in the controversy surrounding *Was bleibt*. This raises challenging questions about another darling of textbooks: West German author Günter Grass, and his much-delayed admission in his 2006 memoir *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (*Peeling the Onion*) that he had been part of the *Waffen-SS*. How do textbooks address this potentially harmful blow to the reputation of a popular West German member of the textbook canon? The answer is that by and large, they don't. Grass retains his role in textbooks as an exemplary author to an even greater extent than Christa Wolf.

Viewed as one of the FRG's most important contemporary authors since the publication of *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*) in 1959, Günter Grass long presented himself as a “moral authority and conscience” of West German society through his political engagement and his writing (*Deutsch 12 2010*, 217).<sup>40</sup> He is represented by multiple texts in most textbooks from the 1990s onward in both FRG and non-FRG contexts, and his importance as an author is highlighted by frequent mentions of his 1999 Nobel Prize in Literature.<sup>41</sup> There are several striking similarities between Grass and Wolf—their much-recognized literary talent, their critique of the political system in an effort to improve it, and their resulting role as moral conscience (whether self-proclaimed or declared by others). Grass had long acknowledged that he fought during the last few months of WWII, and biographers often described his role as that of an anti-aircraft auxiliary (*Flakhelfer*) or a soldier, a description which Grass did not publicly challenge before 2006. In *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*, Grass finally acknowledged that he actually had been

<sup>40</sup> Grass was a vocal supporter of the social democratic SPD and helped campaign for Willy Brandt. His affiliation with the SPD is mentioned in four biographical texts (*Kennwort 11 1992*, *Blickfeld Deutsch 2003*, *KombiKompakt 12 2012*), and *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost 2009*. *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* also uses the term “moralist” to describe Grass (449).

<sup>41</sup> The prize is mentioned in eight textbooks, which represent just over 25 percent of all textbooks analyzed. (*Blickfeld Deutsch 2003*, *Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen 2002*, *Standorte Deutsch 2005*, *Deutsch 12 2010*, *KombiKompakt-12 2012*, *P.A.U.L. D. 2013*, *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost 2009*, *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-NRW 2009*). This may not seem particularly frequent, but many early textbooks do not include biographical information about authors. Generally, if there is a biographical note about Grass, it includes mention of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

conscripted into the *Waffen-SS*, an admission which was noticed by Frank Schirmacher (who had played an important role in the *Literaturstreit* as well) shortly before the book's publication (Herrmann and Horstkotte 2016, 24). While Grass' WWII experiences mirrored those of many members of his generation, this was a polarizing revelation from an author who had frequently criticized others for their collaboration with the Nazi regime and their lack of transparency about the past. The media, led by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, responded in kind.

While the controversy surrounding Grass and *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* played out in world media, it is almost completely absent in textbooks. To some extent this is to be expected, as the revelation about Grass' *Waffen-SS* affiliation came in 2006, and therefore can only impact the most recent generation of textbooks. In fact, fewer than half of textbooks used in 2015 mention Grass' connection to the *Waffen-SS*, and those that do (*Deutsch 12*, *KombiKOMPAKT 12*, *TTS-Ost*) generally stress its brevity and Grass' youth. Three textbooks include *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* in some way, ranging from brief mentions in a biographical text about Grass to a suggested topic for a presentation to an excerpt from the memoir itself.<sup>42</sup> It is the last two examples which most obviously show the tendency of textbooks to portray Grass (as well as Wolf) in a positive light, while at the same time revealing subtle yet important differences in the treatment of the two authors.

The focus on "double historicity" found in *Blickfeld Deutsch* (2010) provides a natural connection between Wolf and Grass. One of the reading questions after Wolf's interview with DIE ZEIT includes a quotation from Grass about *Was bleibt*: "I probably would have advised her to publish the book with an afterword." Students are tasked with writing the afterword "from the view of a contemporary reader" (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2010, 466). This brief insertion of Grass into the context of the *Literaturstreit* is then expanded by the following suggestion for a student presentation: "Similarly to Christa Wolf, Günter Grass also came under criticism after the publication of his book *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (2006). Inform your fellow

<sup>42</sup> *Texte, Themen und Strukturen-Ost* includes the following in its biographical text about Grass: "At the age of 15, Grass volunteered for the Wehrmacht; after service as a *Luftwaffenhelfer* and completion of his Labor Service, Grass was conscripted into a unit of the *Waffen-SS* on November 10, 1944 at the age of 17. He informed the public of his membership in the *Waffen-SS* more than 60 years later, in his 2006 autobiography *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (448)." On the page preceding its excerpt from *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*, *Deutsch 12* mentions the memoir (although not by its title) in a biographical text about Grass, simply referring to "his late revelations about his actions at the end of WWII" (217).

students about the life and work of Günter Grass, and concentrate on the following important aspects: his position on German reunification in 1990; the public criticism triggered by his late admission of membership in the *Waffen-SS* (Ibid., 467). For both Wolf and Grass, the controversy surrounding their literary revelations is acknowledged, but within the larger context of their long and important careers. *Blickfeld Deutsch* maintains the positive portrayal of these exemplary East and West German authors. It is worth noting, however, that the heading for the student presentation topic is “*Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*—Günter Grass’ Painful Process of Remembering,” which suggests that the admission and following controversy were “painful” for Grass. The title of Wolf’s section was “Encountering and Evaluating the Fate of an Author in the Context of the *Wende*,” which does not include a reference to her personal feelings. Is it more painful for a male West German author to finally admit the truth of his WWII past than for a female East German author to explore (in a fictional text) the pain of *Stasi* observation? It must be acknowledged that Grass was conscripted into the *Waffen-SS*, and Wolf voluntarily (briefly) worked with the *Stasi*, but one could argue that these titles are indicative of a hierarchy of victimhood—WWII beats GDR—or gender (male pain trumps female suffering). Regardless of intention, there does appear to be some privileging of Grass over Wolf.<sup>43</sup>

As the only textbook to include an excerpt from Grass’ memoir, *Deutsch 12* (2010) maintains its overall positive portrayal of Grass by presenting

<sup>43</sup> Readers familiar with the *Literaturstreit* and Grass’ work are likely wondering about his much-anticipated novel of reunification, *Ein weites Feld* (1995), which was heavily marketed by the Steidl-Verlag and caused “animated public controversy” (*TTS* 1999, 352). The novel was critically received by a public already sensitized by the *Literaturstreit*, and was widely disparaged by reviewers for its characters, length (over 750 pages!), tone, and lack of insight about the GDR (Wittek 134). The novel is rarely included in textbooks, and generally only mentioned, such as in an informational text about post-1989 literature (*TTS* 1999, 352), and in a list of novels about German reunification for a suggested presentation/report (*TTS-Ost* 2009, 436). The text itself is excerpted in only one textbook (*Sichtweisen* 2002), which places it in the chapter “Ein weites Feld—Der geteilte Himmel.” The reference to titles by Grass and Wolf plays out in the chapter, which consists of nine texts (five Grass, four Wolf). Although *Sichtweisen* uses brief introductory texts for excerpts, they are very “text-focused” (summary, no background), and it is the only textbook used in 2005 that does not include reading questions. Therefore, *Ein weites Feld* is presented devoid of any mention of the *Literaturstreit*, the *Wende*, or contextualizing follow-up questions and assignments. While *Ein weites Feld* caused plenty of controversy with its publication, it has not established itself as part of the textbook canon.

*Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* together with two excerpts from his 1959 best-seller, *Die Blechtrommel*. The theme of the chapter section is “‘Memory Loves the Child’s Game Hide-and-Seek’—Confrontation with the Past and Politicization.”<sup>44</sup> The first *Blechtrommel* excerpt establishes that narrator Oskar Matzerath is a patient in a mental hospital, while the second is a memory of Schmuhs’s onion cellar. These are followed by a brief introductory text about *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*: “In summer 2006 Grass returned to the motif of the onion, as the title of his autobiographical account *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*. This text contains the admission of the author that he was conscripted into the *Waffen-SS* at age 17 near the end of the war. This late admission sparked a broad media debate in which the central question was the moral assessment of this late revelation” (*Deutsch 12* 2010, 218). Rather than include any of the “broad media debate” about Grass, *Deutsch 12* moves directly to the brief excerpt from *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*:

Memory loves the child’s game hide-and-peek. It hides itself away. It tends to sugarcoat and embellish things, often unnecessarily. Memory (*Erinnerung*) contradicts recall (*Gedächtnis*), which is pedantic and fractiously wants to be right. When too many questions are asked, memory (*Erinnerung*) is like an onion that needs to be peeled in order to reveal letter by letter what is readable: seldom clear, often in mirror writing or otherwise made mysterious. (Ibid.)

When read in connection with the excerpts from *Die Blechtrommel*, this idea of the hidden, even coy, nature of memory raises some intriguing questions. Paired with the introductory text, however, it appears that Grass himself may be coyly and conveniently making excuses for his memory problems about his past. Only one—optional—reading question deals directly with this topic, asking students to learn more about “the discussion triggered by his late acknowledgement of his *Waffen-SS* membership.” They are directed to “take a position on the public statements about Grass as a moral authority and the (re)assessment of his work, keeping in mind the results of your previous work” (Ibid., 219). It is this last phrase which most directly reveals the underlying attitude of *Deutsch 12*: that Grass’ long career and literary importance should not be overshadowed by this late-in-life revelation.

<sup>44</sup>The phrase “memory loves the child’s game hide-and-peek” is a quotation from the first chapter of *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*.

## CONCLUSION

Textbooks' treatment of Grass and Wolf reveals a frustrating reality: while FRG authors are given space to grapple with the Nazi dictatorship, GDR authors are not. Nearly a dozen textbooks include excerpts from *Die Blechtrommel*, and other Grass texts frequently appear in chapters about memory, WWII, or coming to terms with the past. In contrast, Christa Wolf's novel *Kindheitsmuster*, which was one of the first novels published in the GDR to deal with the Nazi dictatorship and its impacts in a nuanced way, is excerpted in only four textbooks. Of those four, just one textbook (*Sichtweisen* 2002) includes an excerpt that obviously refers to the 1930s and the rise of Nazism.<sup>45</sup> Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is a work of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* as well, but textbooks do not include it in this context. GDR authors are allowed to come to terms with the East German past, but only FRG authors represent Germany's continued grappling with the Nazi past.

Both Wolf and Grass are popular members of the post-1945 German literature canon, and as such, are frequently included in textbooks. The controversies ignited by *Was bleibt* and *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* put their reputations at risk, and textbooks go to considerable lengths to contextualize, downplay, and potentially silence the critique of their works. When directly compared, however, it does appear that the West German Günter Grass is sheltered more than the East German Christa Wolf. Some of this is related to the timing of their respective controversies (1990 vs. 2006), but it can also be traced to different attitudes towards the GDR vs. the FRG and the moral "failings" of (female) GDR vs. (male) FRG authors. Grass may have lied by omission about his actions during WWII, but he represents the best of West German culture: its creativity, the ability to openly speak truth to power, its victory over socialism. Wolf, in contrast, symbolizes the necessity of conforming (at least to some extent) to an unjust socialist regime, the risks of challenging said regime, and the regime's eventual downfall. The differences in portrayal of the controversies surrounding Wolf and Grass have less to do with the authors themselves than with the worldviews they represented.

<sup>45</sup>The *Blickfeld Deutsch* series (1991, 2003, 2010) includes an excerpt from *Kindheitsmuster* in which Nelly is trying to remember the lines of a Goethe poem. The excerpt appears in the chapter "The Vibrancy of Classicism." In addition, the 2003 version includes an informational text that briefly discusses the novel's exploration of the rise of Nazism, but this topic is not addressed in reading questions or assignments (*Blickfeld Deutsch* 2003, 197).

Christa Wolf has long been one of the most widely-represented GDR authors in textbooks for the *Oberstufe*. Not only are her texts included in nearly every analyzed textbook, they are included in both GDR and non-GDR settings, establishing her as a German author, not “merely” a GDR author. This desire to position Wolf on the right side of history presents some challenges for textbooks as they consider how to address her support of the SED regime. This tension is heightened by the *Literaturstreit*, which publicly challenged Wolf’s positive reputation. Textbooks use various methods to address these challenges, from omitting problematic information about Wolf’s GDR past (such as her short stint as a Stasi informant) to encouraging students to grapple with the complicated reality of authors in the GDR. While perhaps not offered quite as much grace as Günter Grass, Christa Wolf is consistently and clearly portrayed by textbooks as a GDR/German author worth reading and as an enduring literary favorite.

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## Conclusion

Whether or not one agrees with Stefan Heym's description of the GDR as a "footnote of history," the quote does provide some explanation for the ways in which individuals and society grapple with the GDR's legacy. Some wish to disregard the footnotes, to focus on the main body of the text (in this metaphor, West German history and literature), while others want to explore the nuances of the East German footnote. There certainly are important things to find in the footnotes, as this book has aimed to show. Acknowledging the ideological nature of textbooks and examining their portrayal of GDR literature over time can help us to confront underlying attitudes about the former state and its literary accomplishments, to appreciate before we judge, and perhaps to re-evaluate how GDR literature is presented to students.

In the introduction to this book I raised several questions about GDR literature in textbooks: To what extent is it part of the textbook canon? (How) does this change over time? What images are fashioned of the GDR and its creative achievements? Is the emphasis on text, context, or ultimately ideological critique of context? It is this last question which most directly connects to my thesis that textbooks face challenging decisions when presenting GDR literature, in particular where to position it along the literary text—historical/political context spectrum. The diverse choices, which reflect the varied and shifting attitudes about the GDR

amongst Germans themselves, are captured first in federal school documents and state curricula, and then in individual textbooks. This topic was explored in Chap. 2, with later chapters providing in-depth case studies about five representative GDR authors. While each chapter introduces unique aspects to the portrayal of the featured author(s), four larger themes have become apparent as well.

First, developments in curricula and textbooks over time play a significant role in the inclusion and portrayal of GDR literature. Over the past few decades, curricula have become much less a list of required topics and more a set of desired outcomes. This offers a welcome degree of flexibility and autonomy to textbook authors and classroom teachers in selecting content.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it potentially puts GDR literature in the position of “out of sight, out of mind.” Content not required in curricula—especially that as ideologically charged as GDR literature—is more easily ignored in favor of longstanding classroom favorites. It is also safe to say that the risk of GDR literature being overlooked is higher in Western Germany because it was not as firmly established in the literary canon there. This risk may increase in Eastern Germany as the GDR slips further into history and teachers have less experience with, and likely knowledge of, the country and its literature.

Textbook design similarly plays a decisive role in the portrayal of GDR literature. From the simple anthologies of the 1980s to the extensive collections of literary and informational texts today, textbooks have undergone significant changes over time. Early textbooks revealed their ideological goals solely via text selection and grouping; even the GDR textbook *Literatur 11/12* contains no reading questions or historical overviews. Granted, the selection of texts made the socialist tenets very clear, but student attention was focused on literary texts and (at least initially) their personal interaction with these texts. The situation in 2015 is markedly different, with reading questions, author biographies, and extensive historical overviews. This increased contextualization can be incredibly helpful for students with no direct experience of the GDR, but it poses

<sup>1</sup>A similar shift is occurring with textbook approval. Traditionally, each federal state has approved specific textbooks for use. In the past few decades, more states have begun issuing blanket approvals for all textbooks by established publishers. Nordrhein-Westfalen was one of the earliest adopters, allowing schools to select their own textbooks for *Oberstufe* literature courses starting in the mid-1980s. Of the four states included in my analysis, only Bayern still has a list of approved literature textbooks. (Many states continue to require approval of textbooks for religion and ethics classes.)

risks as well. At times, GDR literature becomes overshadowed by information about GDR history and cultural politics, which gives textbook authors a considerable amount of power to form student attitudes toward GDR literature. The ideological goals of current textbooks may be a bit subtler than those of *Literatur 11/12*, but they are clearly shaped and supported by the extra-literary texts these textbooks contain.

Even contemporary textbooks with similar levels of extra-literary contextualization can reveal marked differences in tone. Some textbooks concentrate on informing students about the GDR, while others overtly engage in ideological critique. These differences often fall along geographic lines, with textbooks for conservative and/or Western German states harshly criticizing the SED-led state and those for liberal and/or Eastern German states either downplaying politics or providing a more nuanced view of the socialist system. Students do need to learn about the shortcomings of the GDR, but extensive critique of GDR politics can easily be inferred to apply to GDR literature as well: if the GDR system is inferior to the West, is GDR literature also inferior? The various textbooks used across Germany offer students starkly different answers to that question.

Secondly, socialist realism casts a long shadow. Admittedly, most scholars of GDR literature would not claim that early socialist realist texts are their favorite things to read. The cookie cutter plots of these texts—struggling socialist faces challenges, but with the help of ideologically strong mentors eventually goes on to work successfully for the socialist cause—are incredibly formulaic. (Then again, so are Harlequin romance novels.) More important for (West) German textbooks, however, is the extent to which socialist realism was associated with the SED and ideological control. Rather than evaluating these texts on their literary qualities, textbook authors seem to judge them based on genre alone. Simply being categorized as GDR socialist realism is often enough to doom a text. Very few textbooks provide meaningful insight into the worldview behind socialist realism, choosing instead to oversimplify that socialist realism = SED = bad literature.

This seemingly universal standoffishness toward early GDR literature often leads textbooks to downplay or simply to omit the post-1949 writings of first-generation authors such as Anna Seghers and Bertolt Brecht in an effort to protect their literary reputations. Seghers' pre-GDR socialist realist texts (particularly *Der siebte Kreuz*) are regularly included in textbooks, but her post-1949 texts only appear in the GDR textbook *Literatur*

11/12. Through this silence (often echoed in author biographies), textbooks tacitly imply that Seghers either stopped writing after WWII or that her post-1949 writings are not worth reading. The situation for Brecht is somewhat different, since even his most pro-socialist texts rejected the parameters of socialist realism. However, Brecht texts written in the GDR are included much less frequently in textbooks, and several textbooks gloss over or completely omit any mention of his years in the GDR. The notable exception to this omission of socialist realism is the recurrent appearance of poems by Johannes R. Becher in chapters on early GDR literature. As the author of the GDR national anthem, it is difficult to separate Becher from GDR literature; indeed, he appears to be the designated scapegoat for this generation of authors. Seghers, Brecht, and Becher were all widely-acclaimed authors before the founding of the GDR, but in contrast to Becher, textbook authors seem hesitant to potentially taint the reputations of Seghers and Brecht by affiliating them too closely with the socialist regime.

The exception to the socialist realist “rule” is Christa Wolf and her early novel *Der geteilte Himmel*. Although it fulfills many of the expectations for socialist realist literature, it is mentioned and excerpted in multiple textbooks over several decades. This can be attributed to two factors: the fact that Wolf’s career began after 1949 and her long-lasting popularity in both East and West Germany. In contrast to Seghers, whose GDR writings were viewed in the West as inferior to previous novels, Wolf’s career started during the time of mandated socialist realism. Even then, Wolf’s literary talent and introspective style set *Der geteilte Himmel* apart from many socialist realist texts. Looking back over the arc of Wolf’s career, textbook authors feel comfortable presenting the novel as a palatable starting point, highlighting its aesthetic value over its observance of socialist realist principles.

Thirdly, GDR literature is often limited to a GDR context. The federal requirement for literature instruction in the *Oberstufe* to highlight literary history has also played an important role in textbook design and the portrayal of GDR authors. While many textbooks have thematic chapters, nearly all textbooks include chronological chapters, often ranging from the Baroque to the present. It is therefore no surprise that GDR authors and their texts are included in chapters on GDR literature. However, what becomes clear in the case studies is that some GDR authors are rarely, if ever, presented outside of this “literature in the GDR” context. If GDR literature is to be taken seriously by students and is to remain a meaningful

part of the textbook canon, it should not be relegated exclusively to its GDR context. Only by presenting GDR texts alongside those by Goethe, Thomas Mann, even Shakespeare, can GDR literature be (re-)claimed as German literature worth reading. It is not a case of either-or, but both-and: GDR texts need to be presented both in the context of their publication (the GDR) and in the context of their thematic content.

Wolf Biermann is the most vivid example of the pigeonholing of some GDR authors, as well as how this has increased over time. In 1985, no Biermann texts were found in GDR chapters; by 2015, nearly 85 percent of them were.<sup>2</sup> To some extent this is predictable, as Biermann's texts and biography are so closely associated with events in the GDR, but there are many Biermann poems and songs that could be fruitful additions to thematically-based chapters. *Passagen* (2001) provides a creative example of this, including Biermann's 1975 "Einschlaf- und Aufwachlied" (Falling asleep and waking up song) as a modern example of medieval dawn songs (*Tagelieder*).<sup>3</sup> By and large, however, students are given the message that Biermann is only worth reading as a GDR author, largely because he was a thorn in the side of the SED regime. Positioning Biermann's texts in a GDR context also provides an easy segue to informational texts about his 1976 expatriation and its aftermath. The literary value of Biermann's works is consistently reduced and subsumed by politics.

The greatest contrast to Biermann is found in the multi-faceted portrayal of Christa Wolf. She is by far the author in my case studies who appears most consistently in both GDR and non-GDR contexts. Since the early 1990s, textbooks have acknowledged the literary value of Wolf's writings by including them in thematically-based chapters, while also recognizing Wolf as a GDR author worth reading. Students encounter her texts in multiple settings, with multiple foci.<sup>4</sup> Rather than having her GDR writings ignored (like Seghers and Brecht) or being presented exclusively in a GDR context (like Biermann), Wolf is consistently depicted as a German author as well as a GDR author. If more GDR authors were incorporated into textbooks like Wolf, the ongoing legacy of GDR literature would look much brighter.

<sup>2</sup> Admittedly there were only three Biermann texts in 1985 and thirteen by 2015. In 2015, two of the thirteen texts were presented in a non-GDR context.

<sup>3</sup> The section also includes three medieval poets, such as Dietmar von Aist, along with Paul Celan's "Tagelied."

<sup>4</sup> While not included in my case studies, Sarah Kirsch is one of the few other GDR authors whose portrayal in textbooks frequently spans the GDR/non-GDR divide.

Lastly, literature textbooks have played and continue to play an important role in reflecting and shaping societal attitudes about the GDR. When looking back at literature textbooks 1985–2015, one can clearly trace German history and public discourse. Textbooks in use in 1985 reflected the two Germanys, with the GDR textbook *Literatur 11/12* presenting an unabashedly socialist worldview and most FRG textbooks either ignoring contemporary literature altogether or presenting GDR authors with very little fuss. The existence of the GDR was seen by most as a *fait accompli* and progressive GDR literature was viewed by more liberal textbooks as part of the German-language literary landscape. By 1995 the GDR no longer existed, and battles over its status, legacy, and literature were in full swing. This reappraisal of the past 40 years was amplified by the textbook design development of informational texts. While not driven by German reunification, this new aspect of literature textbooks provided more opportunities to connect texts and context. Certain federal states and textbook authors began to include more critique of the GDR, positioning the GDR as the loser in the clash of political systems. Several textbooks for use in former GDR states took a slightly different approach, including even more GDR literature and explanation of (not apologetics for) the SED state. This post-unification shift intensified in 2005 and 2015. Many current textbooks contain more extra-literary texts than their 1995 counterparts, and the differences in tone have become greater. At the same time, however, the number of GDR texts included in textbooks has increased as well, suggesting a greater openness to the cultural products of the socialist state. This also reflects broader public discourse about the GDR, which in the 1990s predominantly focused on systemic topics such as socialism/authoritarianism, perpetrators/victims, and in later years broadened to explore everyday life (*Alltag*) in the GDR (Ross 2002, 14–15). In 2015, textbooks (and society) appear to acknowledge and even value GDR literature while simultaneously disparaging the GDR state. Textbooks then face the question of which element to emphasize—text or context—and whether to inform or inculcate students about the GDR.

GDR literature still has important contributions to make to today's society. All literature offers readers a chance to experience the world through someone else's eyes, which develops empathy, tolerance, and curiosity. Engaging with creative works from East Germany also allows students to learn about the GDR in a richer, more personal way than is possible in a history textbook or classroom. Reflecting on the contrasts and commonalities between GDR and FRG literature (and post-1990

literature) likewise helps students make sense of their country's past and present, and what it means to be German. Federal education standards and state curricula underscore the value of literary history for *Gymnasium* students, and they view GDR literature as part of that legacy.

As vehicles of “official knowledge,” textbooks occupy a unique and potentially powerful position. For some students, literature textbooks may represent their first and only meaningful encounter with GDR literature. As such, it is important that textbooks present a wide range of GDR authors, that these authors are included in thematic chapters as well as GDR-focused chapters, and that extra-literary texts temper their ideological critique with information presented in a more impartial manner. GDR literature needs to be removed from the footnotes and placed (back) into the main text. It is only then that Germans—Eastern and Western—can truly recognize the aesthetic value of GDR literature, understand the role of its historical context, and re-evaluate the legacy of the GDR.

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## APPENDIX: TEXTBOOKS BY YEAR

Each (West) German state has traditionally published annual lists of all approved textbooks by subject and level. The following information is taken from the textbook approval lists for *Oberstufe* German classes.

### 1985

<i>Title</i>	<i>Publisher (Year)</i>	<i>Bayern</i>	<i>NRW</i>	<i>GDR</i>
<i>Arbeitsbuch Deutsch</i>	Schroedel/Crüwell (1979)	x	x	
<i>Erkennendes Lesen</i>	Buchner (1976)	x		
<i>fragen</i>	Bayerischer Schulbuch-Verlag (1972)	x	x	
<i>Literarisches Leben</i>	Ludwig Auer (1982)	x	x	
<i>Literatur: Lese- und</i> <i>Arbeitsbuch</i>	Hirschgraben (1976/8) <sup>a</sup>	x (1978)	x (1976)	
<i>Perspektiven</i>	Klett (1976)		x	
<i>Text und Dialog</i>	August Bagel (1979)	x	x	
<i>Literatur 11/12</i>	Volk und Wissen (1980)			x

<sup>a</sup>These are two different editions, but are identical

## 1995

<i>Title</i>	<i>Publisher (Year)</i>	<i>Bayern</i>	<i>MV</i>	<i>NRW<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Sachsen</i>
<i>Arbeit mit Texten</i>	Schroedel (1993)		x		x
<i>Blickfeld Deutsch</i>	Schöningh (1991)	x	x		x
<i>Deutsche Dichtung in Epochen</i>	J.B. Metzler (1989)		x		
<i>Kennwort 11-13</i>	Schroedel (1992–1994)	x			
<i>Lesen, Darstellen, Begreifen</i>	Cornelsen/Hirschgraben (1990)		x		x
<i>Standorte</i>	Klett (1991)				x
<i>Texte und Methoden 11-13</i>	Cornelsen (1992–1994)	x			x
<i>Texte, Themen und Strukturen</i>	Cornelsen/Schwann (1990)		x		x

<sup>a</sup>NRW no longer included individual textbooks for *Oberstufe* German in its approval list. In theory, all of these textbooks were approved for use in NRW

## 2005

<i>Title</i>	<i>Publisher (Year)</i>	<i>Bayern</i>	<i>MV</i>	<i>NRW</i>	<i>Sachsen</i>
<i>Blickfeld Deutsch</i>	Schöningh (2003)		x		
<i>Deutsche Literatur in Beispielen</i>	Buchner (2002)	x			
<i>Literatur: ein Lese- und Arbeitsbuch</i>	Volk und Wissen (1998)		x		x
<i>Passagen</i>	Klett (2001)		x		x
<i>Sichtweisen</i>	Bayerischer Schulbuch Verlag (2002)	x			
<i>Standorte Deutsch</i>	Klett (2005)		x		x
<i>Texte, Themen und Strukturen</i>	Cornelsen (1999)		x		

## 2015

<i>Title</i>	<i>Publisher (Year)</i>	<i>Bayern</i>	<i>MV</i>	<i>NRW</i>	<i>Sachsen</i>
<i>Blickfeld Deutsch</i>	Schöningh (2010)				x
<i>Deutsch 11-12</i>	Oldenbourg (2009–2010)	x			
<i>Deutschbuch 12</i>	Cornelsen (2010)	x			

(continued)

(continued)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Publisher (Year)</i>	<i>Bayern</i>	<i>MV</i>	<i>NRW</i>	<i>Sachsen</i>
<i>KombiKOMPAKT 11-12</i>	Buchner (2009–2010)	x			
<i>KombiKOMPAKT Ausgabe N</i>	Buchner (2012)		x		x
<i>P.A.U.L. D.<sup>a</sup></i>	Schöningh (2013)		x		x
<i>Texte, Themen und Strukturen – Östliche Bundesländer</i>	Cornelsen (2009)		x		x
<i>Texte, Themen und Strukturen – NRW</i>	Cornelsen (2009)			x	

<sup>a</sup>P.A.U.L. D. stands for *Persönliches Arbeits- und Lesebuch Deutsch*

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