



## 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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