

Chapter Ten

Bleibt was? East German Science Fiction Since 1990

A search for what remains of East Germany is central to an understanding of the perpetuation of the “inner wall.” Such an investigation sheds light on the processes of remembering and forgetting that make up the foundations of this wall and provide a basis for the assumptions made on both sides that stem from these memories. Nor is the phenomenon of the “inner wall” a static one, but, rather, is transformed by a recurrent renegotiation of memories through which the individual reformulates her or his most recent notion of Germany identity. Reinforcing the notion of an “inner wall,” this identity commonly includes personal association away from one side and with, or towards, the other. Examples of this process range from denials that a GDR culture ever existed or was worthy of recognition to western and eastern forms of *Ostalgie* or nostalgia for the East. These diverse interpretations of a culture that is simultaneously present and absent points to the necessity of a continual, critical reassessment of East Germany’s past. This exercise is crucial to the process of memory creation and revision in the Germany of today and to an understanding of the role that these memories and any “inner wall” will play in the Germany of tomorrow.

In part, this study has participated in the reformation of such memories through its reading of East German science fiction from a contemporary point of view. By collecting the cultural artifacts of this genre and questioning their veritable absence within existing literary histories, my work has sought to demonstrate the continued presence of this science fiction and its textual relevance to German Studies. Yet, East German science fiction did not consist solely of material objects nor of discourses, but also of writers, publishers, and fans, many of which continue to live in the newly unified Federal Republic. To forget the existence of GDR science fiction is to deny the past of those individuals, who participated in its creation and consumption.

A look at East German science fiction and its authors in the era following unification reflects the struggle of the majority of easterners to adapt to an alien socio-economic system and renegotiate their position both inside and outside a new discursive system.

This final chapter looks at recent science fiction by eastern writers after reunification. Since 1990, publication has been sporadic at best. East German writers had occupied a protected island that allowed them, albeit with many restrictions, to develop in a direction primarily free of market forces. They are now experiencing the realities of the German science fiction market, which is dominated by Anglo-American translations. Since presses have been hesitant to publish eastern authors, the majority of stories appear in independent labels. These narratives present a unique access to the changed future visions of authors, who have experienced a historical as well as personal rupture. A brief survey of the nature and type of publications by former East German writers since 1990 helps to illustrate how this very rupture has influenced and shaped their science fiction.

Science fiction always suffers from the march of time, even more than other genres. Since its premise is often couched in technological extrapolation based on existing knowledge and theory, the stories from even ten years ago can seem dated. Stories from the beginning of the 20th century frequently told of alien inhabitants discovered on voyages to the moon, which became impossible when it was confirmed that the moon was lifeless. Tales of great technological feats on Earth (tunneling between Europe and the United States, melting the polar ice caps) both in the East and West have either lost their estrangement effect as they have become reality in some shape or form, or they seem foolish, and even dangerous, from a contemporary point of view. In generic terms, older science fiction begins to take on elements of fantasy as it ages, and its seemingly rational suppositions become more and more irrational with time, as they are proven impossible.

On a cultural and political level, science fiction too can lose its vibrancy. What might have been a marginal or subversive belief in the past can have moved to the center of the present. For instance, George Orwell's *Nineteen-eighty-four* was originally written at the beginning

of the Cold War in 1948 warning of the possibilities of a Soviet victory. From the vantage point of the early 21st century, the original impetus for the book has lost its immediate historical referent. Still, *Nineteen-eighty-four* has not lost its value as a science fiction text. Rather, due to its setting in another place and time, its original premise can be read in many ways that might apply to the context of the current reader. For instance, it can be applied to other authoritarian regimes or as a warning of one to come.

In a like manner, many texts of East German science fiction still contain valuable insights into today's society. For instance, as shown in my analysis of the communist utopia posited by Del Antonio, this text envisions gender equality in a manner as yet unrealized. Issues regarding the environment, as addressed in works by the Brauns, were pertinent in East and West Germany and have become an even more urgent concern in the present. In addition, their use of the concept of play and the game applies not only to the government of East Germany, but to all situations in which the "truth" or the "real" might not be as clear as it seems. Finally, the issue of individual and community continues to be relevant in every society that struggles for this balance. As the potential for multiple readings allowed these authors to bypass the censors in the GDR, this same aspect now enables their works to remain of interest to the contemporary reader.¹

Approaching GDR science fiction as literary, cultural and historical artifact, my study has addressed aspects of memory creation and the existence of a wall in western academic discourse on East German literature. Where the category of literature had been equated with subversion in the Cold War paradigm, I have approached East German science fiction looking not only for qualities of subversion, but also for aspects of affirmation and negotiation with the GDR discursive system. This method does not exclude texts on the basis of ideology, but rather is inclusive in pursuit of my goal to provide for a multifaceted understanding of East German society in its historical and cultural context. Where Del Antonio's text would otherwise be dis-

1 In many ways the study of East Germany, and of history in general, contains its own estrangement effect, set in an alternate time and place much like science fiction, leading to insights into the present.

missed as socialist propaganda, the presence of other narratives that diverged from the rather narrow official party line betrays a more complex negotiation with and transgression of the borders of *Parteilichkeit*. In a similar manner, where the Brauns and the Steinmüllers could be read merely as subversive texts, such an analysis would overlook their corrective intentions and tacit support for the system in which they were participating.

By treating science fiction as text, my study also argues for the inclusion of GDR popular literature in German Studies for the purposes of acknowledging and accessing a broader array of discourses, which shaped the public and private spheres of East Germany. Through its examination of numerous discourses and institutions that influenced East German science fiction, the book refines the definition of East German literature and goes beyond issues central to the German Writers' Union. East German science fiction texts integrated aspects of high and low culture, science and literature, utopia and realism, science fiction and fantasy. A closer look at the transgression of such borders revealed a number of discursive and formal contradictions and presented a more complex understanding of the issues that constituted them. In doing so, I join Bathrick, Hell and others in challenging existing literary histories of East Germany as incomplete in an understanding of the literary traditions and discourses that shape the contemporary memory of what was the literature and culture of the GDR. However, where Bathrick and Hell based their studies on canonical authors, I argue for the inclusion of popular literary texts as a manner in which to access influential discourses that lie beyond canonical boundaries. Thus, by positioning science fiction as a genre within GDR literature, I demonstrate the value of science fiction to East German Studies and hope to contribute to the limited, but growing efforts in the analysis of GDR popular culture.

I also argue for East German science fiction as a legitimate and relatively unexplored tradition in the international arena of science fiction studies and present its range and variety of media and narrative as a rich source for further study. For the most part, students of science fiction have focused entirely on texts from the Anglo-American tradition. The validity of genre studies that focus primarily on works from one cultural tradition is limited by the very geographi-

cal boundaries of that tradition. To become a truly international field, like its objects of study, science fiction studies must recognize and account for the wealth of difference present in texts written by non English-speaking authors.

In the study of East German science fiction, the greatest challenge lies in the availability of and accessibility to what remains of the genre. This problem is best depicted by the fate of *The Dream Master* by the Steinmüllers. After waiting for the accompanying illustrations, this book was finally published in 1990. A title that would have more than likely sold out had it appeared in East Germany prior to 1989, the publication was caught in the upheaval following the fall of the Berlin Wall and was a victim of early signs of the still-existent inner wall. When they finally gained universal access to western goods, easterners ceased buying GDR products (including books). Nor were the majority of westerners drawn by the lure of an exotic East. Long under the impression that everything in the East was either inferior or ideologically problematic, they continued to live and consume in their established patterns. Hence, consumer perception played a primary role in the collapse of the market for eastern products in the early nineties.² Like many other eastern goods, *The Dream Master* fell prey to reunification fallout and did not sell well.³ Today, East German

- 2 Of course the failure of the eastern German economy in a newly reunified Germany was not due purely to a lack of sales. Many social, economic and political factors contributed to the collapse of GDR industry and are still being hotly debated today. Certainly the general lack of efficiency and modernization on the part of East Germany firms made many unprofitable in a free-market system. Yet the less-than-stellar success of Helmut Kohl's reunification plan and, more specifically, the policies of the *Treuhand* contributed to the enormous expense on the part of the German government and people as well as the staggering unemployment rates in many eastern German cities. In many respects, Cold War and intra-German prejudices lie at the heart of assumptions made by both easterners and westerners that affect the efficacy of their mutual policies and interactions.
- 3 Wolfgang Jeschke did bring out an edition of *The Dream Master* in 1992 as editor at the Wilhelm Heyne Verlag in Munich. Yet, a sizable number of the books ended up in the Steinmüllers' basement (Personal interview, 2000).

science fiction titles can be found in eastern used bookstores, at flea markets, in select libraries, and on collectors' shelves.⁴

Although Johanna and Günter Braun declare that "East Germany's fantastic literature is dead" ("De Mortuus" 33), many of its authors are now experiencing a rebirth in the new Germany. At first, many struggled psychologically and financially.⁵ Not only did former East German science fiction authors have to contend with a general aversion to eastern products in the nineties, they experienced intense competition on the German science fiction market.⁶ For several years following reunification, no publisher considered manuscripts by former East German authors (Szameit, Personal interview, 1999). Nor were older titles reprinted.⁷ Since 1996, eastern German authors have made small inroads. Most books have appeared in small publishing houses in the eastern states. Unlike the more visual and accessible comic book *Mosaik* or the cartoon "Unser Sandmännchen," GDR science fiction has only recently begun to benefit from the cultural and media phenomenon of *Ostalgie* to rejuvenate its presence in the mind of the former East German consumer.

Since novels are relatively expensive to print, there has been more activity in the area of short stories. The magazine *Alien Contact* has consistently provided a forum for new and established German science fiction writers since its inception in 1989. Its stories come primarily from former eastern writers, but also include western German and Anglo-American titles. Since 2001, it has appeared solely as an electronic magazine.⁸ The editors of *Alien Contact*, in cooperation with Ekkehard Redlin, published a collection of the best stories from

4 Through the year 2000, it was possible to find whole collections cheaply as easterners sold off their collections to make room for new books or for financial reasons. Many public libraries also jettisoned their GDR science fiction.

5 The most tragic story of this period was the suicide of Gert Prokop, the successful writer of humorous science fiction/detective novels.

6 For instance, at the 1999 European Science Fiction Fan Convention in Dortmund, Germany that was also the German Annual National Convention, German guest authors were few and far between. The majority of fans flocked to hear Brian Aldiss, Terry Pratchett or Ian Watson speak.

7 Nor have any of the titles been translated into English.

8 Beginning in 2003, its editors have brought out the *Shayol Jahrbuch Zur Science Fiction* with the Shayol Verlag.

this magazine, entitled *Herz des Sonnenaufgangs* (Heart of the Dawn, 1996). This anthology is dedicated to topics that were not explorable in the GDR. For instance, half of the book is devoted to religion and the metaphysical. In addition, the majority of stories now lack the central reference point of the East German island and are, in the words of the publisher, “apolitical.”⁹

Also of interest is the collection of alternate histories edited by Erik Simon entitled *Alexanders Langes Leben, Stalins Früher Tod* (Alexander’s Long Life, Stalin’s Early Death, 1999). This international collection of stories, devoted to the reexamination of history, includes “Herrliche Zeiten” (“Magnificent Times”) by Karsten Kruschel. In his version, German unification went much more smoothly after West Germany collapsed and merged with a successful East Germany. In the collection, Erik Simon reexamines German history in the 1930s in his story “Wenn Thälmann 1934 nicht Reichspräsident geworden wäre” (“If Thälmann Had Not Become President of the Empire”). This story suggests that the success of the Communist Party in Germany in the 1930s would have avoided the Holocaust. Instead, it outlines a history in which a coalition between Thälmann and Strasser, head of a splinter group of the Nazi party, desired not the Final Solution but rather a more limited anti-semitic purge of those dangerous to the party within Germany. These events still led to World War II and the occupation of two Germanys by the Allies.¹⁰

Alexander Kröger had the greatest initial success with novels after reunification. One of the most prolific science fiction authors in

- 9 See “Herz des Sonnenaufgangs.” Johanna and Günter Braun have released one new collection of fantasy stories, *Herr A. Morph* (1998) that includes two science fiction stories “Herr Morphs sauberkeitsbessener Sauger” and “Herr Morph erwirbt ein vorauseilendes System.”
- 10 Most of Simon’s writing has appeared following 1990. He has also published two volumes of short stories entitled: *Sternbilder – Simon’s Fiction 1* (2002) and *Mondmysterien – Simon’s Fiction 2* (2003) as well as *Reisen von Zeit zu Zeit – Simon’s Fiction 3* (2004) with Reinhard Heinrich. Simon also edited one final volume of *Lichtjahr* (1999). He also published two volumes of short stories prior to 1989: *Fremder Sterne* (Strange Stars, 1979) and *Mondphantome, Erdbesucher* (Moon Phantoms, Earth Visitors, 1987).

East Germany, he was able to use his remaining royalties and connections to found his own publishing company in 1995 in Cottbus and arrange for their printing in the Czech Republic. Run by his wife, Susanne Routschek, and himself, Kröger has published seven new titles since then, including *Vermißt am Rio Tefé* (Lost on Rio Tefé, 1995/96), *Mimikry* (1996), *Die Mücke Julia* (Mosquito Julia, 1996), *Das zweite Leben* (The Second Life, 1998) and its sequel *Der erste Versuch* (The First Try, 2001), *Saat des Himmels* (Seeds of the Sky 2000), *Falsche Brüder* (False Brothers, 2000), and *Der Geist des Nasreddin* (The Spirit of Nasreddin, 2001) and *Robinas Stunde Null* (Robinas Zero Hour, 2004). The last title is the sequel *Die Kristall Welt der Robina Crux* (The Crystal World of Robina Crux, 1977) republished as *Robina Crux* in 2004. Kröger republished *Die Marsfrau* (The Mars Woman) in 2003. His *Fundsache Venus* (Misplaced Venus, 1998) is a reworking of two titles published in the GDR: *Souvenir vom Ataïr* (Souvenir from Ataïr, 1985) and *Andere* (Others, 1990). As with his East German novels, Kröger writes adventure science fiction for younger readers. Cognizant of western publishing practices that appeal to this new generation as well as to the former East German reader, his books can easily be recognized as a series by their shiny green covers and are broadly distributed. That the eastern German reader is still a target audience is evident by the advertisement of the publication of Kröger's Stasi file *Das Sudelfaß* (1996) on his web site and on other book advertising leaflets (Homepage.) This clearly marks him as a fellow easterner, but also conveys the status of victim. He, thereby, distances himself from the atmosphere of uncertainty in the 1990s generated by the opening of Stasi files and numerous public accusations of Stasi or Party involvement.

On the whole, Kröger's writing style has changed very little since 1990 and continues to evoke his self-described "optimism" and generate "hope" for the future. In part, Kröger sees this as a way in which to counteract what he feels to be the bleak, dystopian trend of the West (Personal interview, 1999). This steadfast belief in socialism can be seen in his recent book *Der erste Versuch*. In the novel, Milan Novatschek has decided to enter a cryo-chamber, avoid the problematic present, and sleep for fifty years to take his chances in the future. His story is told in *Das zweite Leben*. Meanwhile, in *Der erste*

Versuch, Milan's clone works as a spy for the Agency of International Trade Management. This *doppelgänger* intends to sabotage the facilities of the International Consortium. The latter is involved in constructing an energy relay designed to shoot electricity into the atmosphere and then harvest the enormous energy generated by the resulting chemical reaction. This relay is part of a greater network of relays at several points on the globe. The narrative resurrects the early spy motifs common in East German science fiction of the 1950s. However, it differs in its portrayal of both transnational organizations as corrupt, profit-seeking institutions unconcerned with safety and environmental ramifications.

In a parallel development, anthropologist Alina Merkers has just journeyed to a fledgling colony on Mars. Here, Kröger portrays the vanguard of humanity as a utopian colony of scientists who, due to the harsh conditions of the planet, cooperate congenially and efficiently as a cohesive team. An intelligent, independent woman, Alina makes the long journey back to Earth to search for her former boyfriend Milan. She has discovered that he is still alive, when she believed him to be asleep and essentially dead to her. Alina's journey takes her to visit the cloned Milan, where the reader discovers the antithesis of the Mars colony. The Mediterranean island, which is the site of the new power plant, has been attacked several times by business rivals. Alina herself is almost killed due to company intrigue and is one of the few who survive the resultant global disaster on Earth.

Kröger's novel differs from his East German writings first of all in the level of violence in the story. Explosions occur and capitalists attack ships in East German science fiction. However, the graphic description of the destruction of Earth, which follows a catastrophic accident, when the chain of power plants is turned on, would have violated the peaceful, positive outlook of the future of Earth in the GDR. In addition, the cloned Milan is annihilated in the chain-reaction.

Seen in another light, this holocaust can be interpreted as sign of an extreme pessimism regarding the future of humanity, following the disappearance of the more powerful Marxist–Leninist governments on Earth of the present. Yet, Kröger maintains his optimism through the

survival of the remaining humans in space and Alina, who finds herself en route from Mars on a second journey to Earth when the accident occurs. The negative, regressive elements of humanity have been annihilated. The remaining population, composed largely of scientists, is left to resettle Earth and further develop the socialist-style utopia on Mars.

Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller have also published successfully in the post-unification period. Much of their work has consisted of secondary material and academic work in the area of Future Studies. In the new century, they have found a market for their latest novel *Spera* as well as a collection of old short stories *Warmzeit. Geschichten aus dem 21. Jahrhundert*. (The Warming Season. Stories from the Twenty-first Century, 2003).¹¹ A science fiction-fantasy, *Spera* is a new addition to the fictional universe of *Andymon* and *The Dream Master*. It is made up of a variety of short stories, which the Steinmüllers have written over the last fifteen years. Together these stories fill in the gap between *Andymon* and *The Dream Master*. They also recount the arrival of a second Earth ship to the planet, *Spera*, some time after the fall of the Dream Tower.

Publications by the Steinmüllers and Alexander Kröger represent the small number of entirely new science fiction novels that have been published in a united Germany by former East German authors. The majority of subsequent novels are new editions of old East German publications or reworkings of unpublished manuscripts, the appearance of which signals the resurrection and/or continuation of what still can be called GDR science fiction.

In the nineties, publishers often avoided the GDR designation for fear that it will hamper book sales. For instance, the most recent publication by Michael Szameit has no mention of his status as a former East German on its cover except for the name of its publisher: Das Neue Berlin.¹² Written in the final years of the GDR, Szameit reworked his manuscript to fit what he called a “western sensibility” in

11 These new additions appeared in Berlin’s Shayol Verlag, which is run by members of the two fan clubs from former East and West Berlin.

12 This publisher has now experienced yet another “new Berlin.” The Verlag Neues Leben also still exists, having merged with the Eulenspiegel Verlag.

the late nineties (Personal interview, 1999). He changed the title to the American-sounding *Copyworld* (1999). A science fiction-fantasy, Szameit juxtaposes two different worlds: one a mystic hunter-gatherer society, the second a post-modern, dystopian world of genetically altered, digitized humans.¹³

Like Szameit, it is not uncommon for former GDR authors to publish novels from the “dresser drawer,” which they wrote in the late eighties. These titles either 1) remained unsubmitted by authors who knew they were unpublishable, 2) were victims of the slow GDR review process, or 3) were rejected outright. Rainer Fuhrmann’s *Kairo*, the third title of his to be published in the Heyne Science Fiction and Fantasy series, appeared in 1996 as a posthumous tribute to the author.¹⁴ The appearance of a “socialist government” that is trying to protect the morals of its colony signifies a continued participation in the rhetorical strategies practiced by GDR authors. It juxtaposes two societies, but these two are identified in the Cold War terms of as a socialist society and a capitalist society. The equally prolific, Karl Heinz Tuschel published *Der Mann von IDEA* (The Man from IDEA) in 1996. In the novel, the telepathic Ross Bernard reconnects various communities on Earth thirty-three years after an environmental catastrophe destroyed one-fifth of its population. Klaus Frühauf’s *Die Stadt der tausend Augen* is an Orwellian dystopia that incorporates elements of fantasy to warn of the totalitarian potential of the Internet. It was originally rejected by the Verlag Neues Leben in 1988 and did not appear until 2000 with the H & F Verlag. Klaus Frühauf has also recently had ten of his GDR novels reissued by the MV Taschenbuchverlag.

Still, Klaus Frühauf’s latest science fiction deals with contemporary problems and has left his socialist style behind. His new dystopian novel *Aufstand der Sterblichen* (2003) places German politicians in the bodies of star athletes so that they might profit from their fame. Frühauf’s *Finale* (Finals, 1996) contains a violent plot with references to the border wars in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria and a setting on

13 Other recent new editions include Klaus Frühauf’s *Finale* and a book by Karl Heinz Tuschel. See Neumann, “Kröger” 23.

14 Fuhrmann died in 1990. See Redlin, “Kairo’s Geheimnis” 12.

the A20, the former East's coastal highway (Neumann, "Kröger" 23). Frühauf, himself, continues to write as he finds it therapeutic (E-mail 1).

A quick survey of the new novels published since 1990 by former East Germans reveals a highly pessimistic view of the future. Some reflect attitudes of writers and editors who are still committed to the idea of communism, such as Kröger and Redlin. Redlin believes "cultural pessimism" dominates today's science fiction as well as a lack of perspective and materialist interpretation ("Letter" 2). Stories by Kröger, Kruschel, and Simon reinterpret existing history from the viewpoint of historical inevitability, or they rewrite it to salvage, or alternately parody, the socialist project in some form.¹⁵

This pessimism and cynicism is by no means characteristic of all of their stories nor is it of the entire eastern science fiction community. Indeed, both designations "eastern" and "community" are slowly eroding. Where some authors market their works in terms of Ostalgia others, such as the Steinmüllers, Simon and Szameit have long left this phenomenon behind. Furthermore, some recent science fiction by Kröger, Frühauf and Tuschel directly address Germany's contemporary challenges, such as bio-ethics and environmental reform.¹⁶ Therefore, if GDR science fiction no longer exists, then what remains and follows? This is the question that today's authors continue to discover.

15 See *Das zweite Leben, Der erste Versuch* by Kröger and Simon, *Alexanders Langes Leben, Stalins Früher Tod*.

16 See Kröger's *Chimera*, Frühauf's *Aufstand der Sterblichen*, and Tuschel's *Der Mann von IDEA*.