

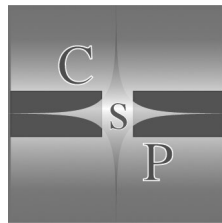
Ossi Wessi



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Edited by

Donald Backman and Aida Sakalauskaite



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Dedicated to  
Vytautas, Vilius, Saulius, and Steve  
for their support



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Images and Tables.....	ix
Acknowledgements .....	x
Introduction .....	xi
“A Difficult Marriage”: Marriage and Marital Breakdown in Post- Unification Literature	
Alison Lewis.....	1
Surveillance, Perversion ,and the Last Days of the GDR: A Reading of Thomas Brussig’s <i>Heroes Like Us</i>	
John Griffith Urang .....	25
Literature and Reunification: Berlin	
Philip Broadbent.....	37
The <i>Zonenkinder</i> Debate: An Analysis of Media Reaction to Two Popular Memoirs Written by East Germany’s Youngest Generation of Authors	
Jennifer Bierich-Shahbazi.....	57
<i>Ostalgie</i> als <i>Verfremdungseffekt</i> in Neo Rauch’s Paintings	
Beret Norman .....	75
Screening the “Old” West Germany? The Federal Republic of Germany from Foundation to Unification in Sönke Wortmann’s <i>Das Wunder von Bern</i> (2003) and Leander Haußmann’s <i>Herr Lehmann</i> (2003)	
Andrew Plowman .....	89
Forgetting <i>Die Architekten</i> : Towards a New Approach to DEFA and <i>Wende</i> Film	
Susan Buzzelli .....	105

<i>Sächsisch als Verlierersprache?: An Examination of the “Mauer in den Köpfen” from a Linguistic Perspective 15 Years after Reunification</i> Keith Kennetz .....	125
Negotiating German Identities in Classroom Interaction – An Analysis of Pronoun Use Anja Vogel .....	143
<i>Was ist die DDR?: Suggestions for Presenting the GDR to the American High School Student</i> Alexis Spry .....	171
Ossi-Wessi Queer: Literary Constructions of Gay Sensibilities and German Reunification Rolf Goebel .....	187
Unequal Sisters: The Wall Fell but (Language-)Barriers Remained Marion Gerlind .....	201
History in the Service of Politics: The Fiftieth Anniversary of the East German Uprising of June 17, 1953 and German National Identity Nadine Zimmerli .....	221
From SS to Stasi and Back Again?: <i>Ossis, Wessis</i> , and Right Extremists in Contemporary Germany Nitzan Shoshan .....	241
Contributors .....	267

## LIST OF IMAGES AND TABLES

8.1 Combined Dresdeners' Evaluation of Female Dresden Voice.....	129
8.2 Combined Dresdeners' Evaluation of Male Dresden Voice.....	130
8.3 Combined Bambergers' Evaluation of Female Dresden Voice.....	131
8.4 Combined Bambergers' Evaluation of Male Dresden Voice.....	132
8.5 Perceptions of Local Speech, Dresden & Bamberg Informants .....	133
8.6 Examples of Survey Questions (abridged) .....	140
9.1 Berlin Research Participants.....	145
9.2 East Berlin teacher (male): inclusive <i>ich</i> .....	147
9.3 East Berlin teacher (female): inclusive <i>ich</i> .....	148
9.4 West German teacher (female): inclusive <i>ich</i> .....	149
9.5 East German teacher identification of students .....	152
9.6 East German teacher-student identification .....	153
9.7 East German teacher-student identification .....	155
9.8 East German teacher-student identification: <i>your home</i> .....	155
9.9 West German teacher: exclusive identification .....	156
9.10 West German teacher: impersonal identification.....	158
9.11 West German teacher: inclusive identity .....	159
9.12 Student pronoun use.....	161
9.13 Student resistance to East German identity.....	162
9.14 Teacher Socialization Part I.....	165
9.15 Teacher Socialization Part II.....	166
10.1 "Fünfjahresplan" Stamps .....	177
10.2 "20 Jahre Deutsche Demokratische Republik" Stamps .....	178
10.3 The Established Phase Stamps.....	179
12.1 Advertisement.....	215
12.2 Sample Letter.....	216
12.3 Heighten Women's Visibility .....	217
12.4 Translation of <i>Namenwahl</i> .....	218

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## INTRODUCTION

Im Jahre 1961 wurde die Lage in Europa stabilisiert, wurde der Frieden gerettet .... Die Mauer wird in 50 und auch in 100 Jahren noch bestehen bleiben, wenn die dazu vorhandenen Gründe noch nicht beseitigt worden sind.

—Erich Honecker, January 1989<sup>1</sup>

Could Erich Honecker have known, when these words were spoken, that the very idea of the GDR was about to be threatened? We read these words today with a great feeling of irony; yet, they were intended as a declaration of the strength and solidarity of the SED<sup>2</sup> and the GDR. As the coming years progressed these words would be regarded as the misguided ramblings of a leader attempting to prop up a failing government. The conflict between Honecker's motivations and the later interpretation of his words; the present political situation in Germany, and the Wende's representation in contemporary German literature were but a few of the issues we hoped to explore during the course of the fourteenth annual Interdisciplinary German Studies Conference, "Ossi Wessi," held at the University of California, Berkeley (March 17-19, 2006). The volume that follows is a collection of the papers presented at that conference, and offers a sampling of research presently being conducted about Germany since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Truly, the history of the Berlin Wall begins not in 1961, or 1945. It began January 18, 1871 when Kaiser Wilhelm, declared the existence of a united, imperial, German nation:

Wir übernehmen die Kaiserliche Würde in dem Bewußtsein der Pflicht, in Deutscher Treue die Rechte des Reiches und seiner Glieder zu schützen, den Frieden zu wahren, die Unabhängigkeit Deutschlands, gestützt auf die

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<sup>1</sup> "In 1961 the situation in Europe was stabilized, the peace was saved...The Wall will in 50 even in 100 years persist in its existence, if the reasons for its presence have not been abolished." (trans. Donald E. Backman)

<sup>2</sup> Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland (Socialist Unity Party of German)

geeinte Kraft seines Volkes, zu verteidigen. Wir nehmen sie an in der Hoffnung, daß dem Deutschen Volke vergönnt sein wird, den Lohn seiner heißen und opfermütigen Kämpfe in dauerndem Frieden und innerhalb der Grenzen zu genießen, welche dem Vaterlande die seit Jahrhunderten entbehrte Sicherung gegen erneute Angriffe Frankreichs gewähren.<sup>3</sup>

With these equally famous words, Kaiser Wilhelm created the first version of a united Germany. His vision of the new Germany is that of an independent, united nation, whose strength derives from the strength of its people. The strength of his people will guide Wilhelm in his quest to maintain a lasting German peace. Since this time the German nation has been in almost constant turmoil, the ins and outs of which need not be detailed here. Suffice it to say that World War I, World War II, and the years 1945-1989 served to further delay Kaiser Wilhelm's dream of a united, peaceful Germany.

When the Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989 there was a feeling of hope, of wrongs righted, and of endless possibilities that swept the globe. There were discussions of the potential economic superpower that would be a united Germany, and there were discussions in the GDR of needing to protect their own interests in fear of being simply taken over by the FRG. Over the following 20 years some of these hopes and fears have become a reality, but the question of the German nation is still one that deserves further discussion.

In the words of Benedict Anderson,

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them...has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. ... Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. (Anderson, 7)

But what does one do in a nation that has been forcefully divided into two nations, then at the behest of both nations reunited, only to find that they had lost a lot of the common ground that used to unite them? Does the

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<sup>3</sup> We assume the Imperial dignity in the awareness of the duty to protect, in German loyalty, the rights, the peace of the empire and its members; to defend the independence of Germany, founded on the united strength of its people. We assume it in the hope that the German people will be granted the reward for its heated battles, in which they willingly sacrificed, and that they will enjoy continuous peace within [Germany's] borders, and bestow upon the fatherland protection against renewed attacks from France, which it has lacked for centuries. (trans. Donald E. Backman)

deep, horizontal comradeship still exist? If so, is it strong enough to ever fully reunite the German people into one nation, or will they eternally be referred to as Ossis and Wessis?

The story of the Berlin Wall is in this manner not entirely unlike that of the US Civil War. Although our war caused a rift and division that lasted only four years, there is still much talk of the differences between North and South. Recent debates about educational quality below the Mason-Dixon Line<sup>4</sup>, as well as issues surrounding the flying of the Confederate Flag serve to underline the fact that after 143 years we, in the United States, still struggle with our own issues of reunification. It is not our intention to hold the United States up as a paragon of reunification, but our situation is one that should receive more attention when the *long* German struggle for reunification is discussed.

If the US is yet to overcome four years of separation it should come as no surprise that the Germans still struggle with similar issues. Unemployment is still at record levels in former East Germany, and the recent successes of the NPD<sup>5</sup> in elections point toward continued dissatisfaction with the reunification process. In 2008, 18 years after reunification it is clear that the community everyone had imagined will be a long time coming.

From the perspective of linguistics the situation is perhaps even more complicated. It was not until the Early New High German period (end of 14<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century) that the German Language finally began moving toward unification. Before this, the German language and German speaking areas were strictly divided into dialects. The Early New High German period is not marked by any outstanding linguistic change in language. Most of the changes, such as diphthongization, umlauting, and compounding, had already started in the Old High German, Old Saxon and Middle High German periods and continued throughout the Early New High German Period. This period is mainly marked by the translations of the Bible by Martin Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which led to a long process of unification of German language. The Bible was available not only to nobles, but to each citizen of the German speaking realm and it was a strong encouragement for education, which can be seen through the works of several grammarians of that time,

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<sup>4</sup> In 2006 per capita spending on student education was below the national average in each of the states below the Mason-Dixon Line. (U.S. Department of Education 2008)

<sup>5</sup> The Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands is a political party formed in the 1960's and following a platform similar to that of the Nationalsozialistische Partei Deutschlands.

such as Valentin Ickelsamer (16<sup>th</sup> century), Johannes Kolross (16<sup>th</sup> century), Hans Farbitius (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries). It seemed that the need to unify and make the German language more accessible to all citizens was the major task for many scholars. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the brothers Grimm expanded this research by tracing the roots of the German language and reconstructing them. They emphasized the identity of the 'language' and 'people' and stated that this identity is reflected not only in the current practice of the language, but also in the history of the language itself.

The question is – what happened with Germany between 1945-1990 that led to a disunity of the German language as well as disunity of the state and the nation. Did the Wall separate the two Germanys politically *and* linguistically? Is it possible that after centuries of attempts to unite the German language, all of the work was undone in a mere 55 years?

The rapid development of economic and cultural globalization during the 20<sup>th</sup> century contributed greatly to linguistic changes in many western European countries, including Germany. Since Germany was divided into two states, there was little or no communication between the two when decisions were being made as to which term to apply to certain objects. The terms originated independently in both states to designate the new objects, institutions, concepts, and processes. However, similar equivalents can be found in both states. Stevenson provides many examples, such as *Ministerrat* and *Bundesregierung* for 'government' in the GDR and the Federal Republic respectively<sup>6</sup>. However, there are more examples which indicate a specific term to one speech community or the other.

Research for a sociolinguistic History of East and West in Germany performed by Patrick Stevenson indicates several interesting points. He starts by analyzing the divided Germany, between 1945-1990, and later continues with the effects of the Reunification of Germany between 1990-2000 on language and society. He designates several reasons why the German languages went different ways between 1945 and 1990. There were new words needed to indicate new things, institutions or terms in both states. However, due to the lack of communication many terms were specific to one speech community or the other. For example, in the GDR, the following terms were frequently used: *Erweiterte Oberschule* 'secondary school', *Elternaktiv* 'parents' work group', *Kombinat* 'combine'. In the Federal Republic, terms such as *Gesamtschule*

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<sup>6</sup> For more examples, see Stevenson, P. *Language and German Disunity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.

‘comprehensive school’, *Arbeitsmarkt* ‘job market’, *Konzern* ‘business, firm’ are found. In both states, old words acquired different meanings. For example, *Brigade* designated ‘a small group of people working together in a socialist enterprise’ and ‘unit in the army’ in GDR and the Federal Republic respectively. Another category indicates different words being used to indicate the same or similar meaning. For example, ‘retirement home’ was *Feierabendheim* and *Seniorenheim* in the GDR and Federal Republic respectively.

Stevenson also indicates that the collision of two such diverse states in 1989-1990 brought immediate changes not only in politics, economy, and culture, but also into the language. For example, some ‘old’ (mostly eastern) words were removed from active usage; some ‘old’ (western) words (which also included anglicisms) were introduced to East German speakers. Words in use before both states were separated and treated as archaic in the GDR were re-introduced to East German speakers. Some taboo words and topics returned to official usage. Although most of these processes were automatic, not all of them were well received in the GDR or in the Federal Republic. East Germans were the ones, who had to undergo the biggest transformations. This whole process also boosted the question of correct spelling, punctuation, stylistic questions and so forth. All of these problems contributed to the *Rechtschreibungsreform* ‘spelling reform’ and finally, 15 years after reunification of Germany, both former East and West Germans were united; not only politically, socially and culturally, but also linguistically.

Other linguistic changes, which influenced the German language despite the previous division of Germany, took place after the reunification as well. Some of them began during the period after World War II and still continue to this day. For example the truncation of polysyllabic words in German. In most cases this creates bisyllabic abbreviations in which the first syllable varies meaning while the second functions as a derivative element, indicating an emotional or gender-specific characterization. *Der Ostdeutsche* ‘East German’ mutates into *Ossi*, *Der Westdeutsche* ‘West German’ into *Wessi*, *Der Bundesbürger* into *Bundi*. The use of these abbreviations is widespread and they are even to be found in the columns of serious newspapers. *Ossi* and *Wessi* appear in the 1991 Duden dictionary. Other words follow the same pattern and include *Ziggi* for *Zigarette* ‘cigarette’ and can even extend to proper names, such as the once popular *Gorbi* for *Gorbachov*. Bisyllabic words can also be abbreviated in this fashion: *Putzi* for *Putzfrau* ‘cleaning lady’ or *Touri* for *Tourist* ‘tourist’. However the *-i* has no positive emotions in

such abbreviations. Other examples include *Ami* for *Amerikaner* ‘an American’ or *Nazi* for *Nazionalsozialist* ‘national socialist’.

## Contributions

It was out of this propensity for bi-syllabic abbreviations that the title of our conference and ultimately this collection derived its somewhat controversial title. By juxtaposing the *Ossi* and the *Wessi* we feel the title represents not only the post-Wall reality of the language, but also highlights the fact that issues of reunification are still felt strongly on both sides of the former divide. As the essays were selected for this volume it became clear that the topics to be covered would also not easily allow themselves to be placed into neat categories. As a result we have decided to allow the papers to flow into and between each other in a way that ultimately creates a chronicle of the Fall of the Wall that delves into art, literature, film, politics, linguistics and even education.

The collection begins with an essay that explores the trope of marriage and marital breakdown through Monika Maron’s *Animal Triste* (1996) with special attention to the metaphor of marriage both political and literary. Alison Lewis’s reading of *Animal Triste* suggests that “...a marriage of such extreme opposites [would] make any lasting union an improbable, almost grotesque feat.” Commenting here on the literary marriage, her interpretation suggests that marital breakdown is used in the post-wall period as literary trope to comment on the possibilities of the future of a united Germany.

Looking not to the future of Germany, but to the past of the GDR, John Griffith Urang demonstrates “the place of State Security in the collective imagination of the former GDR” through a discussion of Thomas Brussig’s *Helden Wie Wir* (1995). Urang argues that Brussig’s novel, which presents itself as one sexually deviant’s account of his work in the Stasi in its latter years, juxtaposes state surveillance with a gaze of sexual desire thus creating a retrospective revision of Stasi fantasies in post-unification Germany.

Philip Broadbent’s essay, “Literature and Reunification: Berlin” discusses Günter Grass’s *Ein weites Feld* (1997) and Tanja Dücker’s *Spielzone* (1999) while arguing “that their portrayals of [Berlin] knowingly contribute to the revisionist debates that sought to redefine the memory of National Socialism in and for a reunified Germany.” The characters in these two novels, argues Broadbent, wander Berlin not in a topographic nature, but have moved beyond its topography, creating an epistemological shift allowing the city to be seen through time and space.

Grass and Dücker raise the specter of National Socialism emphasizing Berlin as a city containing multiple sites that remind its citizens of their membership in a wider cultural and social framework.

In Chapter four, Jennifer Bierich-Shahbazi takes up the media's reception of recent novels by East German authors, in particular Jana Henzel's *Zonenkinder* (2002) and Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (2003). Bierich-Shahbazi, through analysis of the "Zonenkinder Debate" concludes that "the criticisms say more about the critics' expectations of how East Germany should be reconstructed, a reinforcement of the negative images of the GDR, rather than their opinions about the novel. The hegemony of one country over another, such as West Germany over the former East, commonly leads to a critical interpretation of the subjugated government."

Moving away from literature into the media and finally into the fine arts, Beret Norman uses Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* as a starting point for teasing out the effects of Neo Rauch's disorienting use of space and scale. Through his paintings and his color palette, Norman argues, Rauch offers the viewer a nostalgic (*Ostalgic?*) view of the GDR. She further argues that his use of a "faux Socialist Realism" is both ironic and disorienting, leaving the viewer unsure of the aim of the painting. Is the canvas in praise of or critical of the GDR?

In "Screening the "old" West Germany? The Federal Republic of Germany from Foundation to Unification in Sönke Wortmann's *Das Wunder von Bern* (2003) and Leander Haussmann's *Herr Lehmann* (2003)" Andrew Plowman offers an interpretation of the two films by way of understanding the representation of the West German past in Germany today. Through *Das Wunder von Bern* and *Herr Lehmann* one sees "just how powerfully the history of the Federal Republic before 1990 is being reshaped according to the demands of the new normality of the so-called 'Berlin Republic.'" He further argues that the films also present a construct that should remind the viewer that these presentations of the West German past are open to be challenged and contested.

Similar to Plowman's work on West German film, Susan Buzzelli then offers a discussion of the two "East German" films, *Nikolaikirche* (1995) and *die Architekten* (1990), proposing that recent trends in scholarship tend toward interpretations of late DEFA films as feeding into a notion that the fall of the wall was inevitable. She shows that the dis/connections between these films' allow for alternate readings of East German films.

Chapter Eight moves away from film and the arts into the realm of linguistics. Keith Kennetz analyzes the present day status of Saxon German in "*Sächsisch als Verlierersprache?*" Through interviews

conducted with Germans Kennetz describes and analyzes the perceived linguistic “wall in the mind” that continues to exist. Interestingly, he found in his limited sampling of respondents that although Saxons are aware of the status of their accent as being refined, they themselves deem it as pleasant but uneducated, unrefined and incorrect.

Anja Vogel presents research conducted in Berlin high school history classrooms conducted in both former East and former West Berlin. Through her analysis of classroom interactions, she finds and demonstrates the “Negotiation of German Identity” in present-day Berlin classrooms. In fact, her work points to an already disappearing wall among students who are too young to have experienced the fall of the Wall themselves.

If the Wall and its conception are disappearing in the minds of the next generation, then Alexis Spry’s project, which details potential methods for presenting the GDR in American classrooms goes a long way toward keeping the memory of a divided Germany alive. By using *Realia*, she suggests, educators can engender interest in the minds of students now 20 years removed the history that was the GDR and the FRG.

Next Rolf Goebel and Marion Gerlind discuss issues often left out of discussions about reunification: homosexuality and feminist equality. First, Rolf Goebel’s “Ossi-Wessi Queer” discusses notions of Queer identity presented in through Napoleon Seyfarth’s autobiography *Schweine müssen nackt sein* (1991), Joachim Helfer’s *Cohn & König* (1998) and Michael Sollorz’ *Abel und Joe* (1994). Through his analysis of these three works, Goebel demonstrates how “[q]ueering functions as a continuous and open-ended process of strategic transgression, questioning both the implicitly optimistic connotations of talk about normalization and the simplistically binary rhetoric of the *Wessi/Ossi* conflict.”

Marion Gerlind’s “Unequal Sisters” questions this same rhetoric, while discussing the women’s rights movement before and after the fall of the Wall. Through discussion of interviews and media sources Gerlind demonstrates the hopes held by those in the women’s rights movement as the Wall fell. In the end their hopes of equality post 1989 turn out to have been unrealized as, in fact, the status of the women in East Germany, could be argued to have lost ground in the struggle for equality.

Finally, the volume moves toward a more political discussion of the *Wende*. Nadine Zimmerli provides an interesting analysis of the appropriation of the June 17, 1953 uprising in service of German national identity during its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2003. She notes that the uprising was virtually ignored in 1993, when hopes were still high that reunification would work smoothly and that Germany would quickly regain its earlier

glory. Although the appropriation of the uprising could be problematic, Zimmerli argues that, if done properly, observations of this anniversary could be an important step toward unifying the “hearts and minds” of the Germans.

The concluding essay by Nitzan Shoshan takes an anthropological approach to discussing Right Extremists in contemporary East Germany. Through his lengthy discussion Shoshan details the rise of the Right Extremists, and most importantly, the difficulties that would be caused by silencing their controversial, if essential, voice.

*Ossi Wessi* through its broad spectrum of essays seeks not to detail the state of the German nation, or to declare a problem begun or a problem solved. We hope that by discussing as many aspects of the culture as we could that a picture would evolve, and we feel we have accomplished this goal. Each essay stands alone as a contribution to current work in the field, while together the ideas blend from one to another demonstrating the continued complexity of the German nation, and the difficulties it has faced during this, its first 20 years since reunification.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# “A DIFFICULT MARRIAGE”: MARRIAGE AND MARITAL BREAKDOWN IN POST-UNIFICATION LITERATURE

ALISON LEWIS

In newspapers and cartoons of the time, it was customary to depict German unification in terms of a romance between East and West. The scenarios varied from a couple holding hands and a hopeful courtship, to a couple sleeping in a marital bed, a shot-gun wedding, a marriage and the image of unification as an uninterrupted sexual union. Invariably, the romance was between a dominant, masculine West Germany and a weak or weaker, feminized East Germany.<sup>1</sup> This metaphorization of unification, which continued throughout the decade, invokes a supposedly natural gender hierarchy in a meta-narrative of romance that puts gender at the forefront of the project of unifying the nation.<sup>2</sup> Willy Brandt's now famous prediction that what belongs together will grow together likewise draws on an organic, seemingly natural order of things to lend legitimacy to the politics of German unity. A corollary to the meta-narrative of unification as heterosexual marriage can be found in a number of literary works in the first decade after unification that focus on romances, intimate relationships, families, love affairs, and marriages. This chapter explores the trope of marriage and marital breakdown through the example of one post-unification novel, Monika Maron's *Animal Triste* (1996)<sup>3</sup>. Of particular interest here is the way in which the metaphorical "political marriage" of the two Germanys is mapped onto the "literary marriage."

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<sup>1</sup> Morrison, "The Feminization of the German Democratic Republic in Political Cartoons, 35-51.

<sup>2</sup> See esp. Morrison, "The Feminization of the German Democratic Republic," 50 and Scharpe, "Male Privilege and Female Virtue: Gendered Representations of the Two Germanies, 97, 104.

<sup>3</sup> Later in text AT for Maron, Monika. *Animal Triste*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1996. and ATE for Maron, Monika. *Animal Triste*. Trans. by Brigitte Goldstein. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 2000.

More specifically, this chapter is concerned with how the narrative syntagma of the end of a marriage is used by writers to explore the effects on intimacy of the transition from one social and political system to another. Do we see Brandt's faith in the unification process reproduced in people's private lives? Do literary accounts of unification affirm or refute the meta-narrative of unification as a romance and a happy marriage? Or do they suggest, instead, that the political union was from the start a difficult marriage between East and West that consisted of a grotesquely unequal union between an ill-matched couple—much less a marriage “made in heaven” than an ill-fated marriage “until death us do part?”

In a number of post-unification novels, the surge in individualization that unification precipitated finds expression in the profound effects that the changes had on characters' private lives, most prominently on intimate relationships and marriages. It is striking just how many East German couples break up or drift apart because of the stresses and strains of economic restructuring and job losses, which effectively drive a wedge between previously happily married couples. In Jens Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen (The Room Fountain)* (1995), for instance, the narrator's wife, who has made the transition to capitalism effortlessly, moves out of the marital home in the East, leaving her hapless husband to struggle on alone with the brave new world of marketing and consumer capitalism. In Brigitte Burmeister's *Unter dem Namen Norma (Under the Name of Norma)* (1994) too, it is the demand for a more mobile and flexible work force, as well as the promise of a new beginning in the West, that causes husband and wife to part ways, with the husband going West and the wife staying behind in the East. But it is not just the demand for greater mobility in the workplace that drives this couple apart; the husband's move West is symbolic of a far deeper ideological gulf emerging between the two, who now find that they disagree violently on virtually every aspect of the unification process. Infidelity and betrayal, especially betrayal with a West German, are also at the root of marital breakdown among East German couples, as can be seen in a short story by Bernhard Schlink. In the story “Der Seitensprung” (“The Affair”) in the collection of stories *Liebesfluchten (Flights of Love)* Schlink plays off two different types of betrayal against each other: on the one hand the betrayal of secrets by Stasi informers and, on the other hand, sexual betrayal of a husband by his wife. When the wife of a Stasi IM discovers her husband was an informant, she retaliates with her own form of betrayal, and has an affair with her husband's best friend from the West. In Reinhard Jirgl's *Die atlantische Mauer (The Atlantic Wall)* (2000) the sexual betrayal is of

a different kind. Here the narrator's parents' marriage is destroyed when the mother leaves her husband for a West German lesbian lover.

The most sustained and nuanced exploration of the theme of marital breakdown, love and infidelity in the wake of German unification can be found in Monika Maron's critically acclaimed novel *Animal Triste* published in 1996. In this tale of obsessive, unconditional love between an East German paleontologist and a hymenopterologist, or researcher of insects, from Ulm there are no less than seven married or de facto couples mentioned, whose marriages are adversely affected by the "Wende" ("change"/"turning point") or what the narrator prefers to refer to obliquely as "das Jahr der Freiheit" (AT 88) ("the year of liberation" (ATE 46)), or the year when the "seltsame Zeit" (AT 30, 45) ("peculiar time" (ATE 21)), "die Freiheitsbande" (AT 45) ("gang of liberationists" (ATE 21)) and the "Bandenherrschaft" (AT 86) ("gangster regime" (ATE 41)), came to an end. On the one hand the fairly brief anecdotes about these marriages provide a rare sense of social and historical context for the central narrative about the love affair between the nameless female narrator and her lover, whom she calls Franz. The narrative, which consists of recovered and possibly invented fragments of memory of the affair, interspersed with anecdotes from the past, has otherwise very few concrete references to the narrated time of the early nineteen-nineties, although the love affair obviously takes place in Berlin in the summer of 1990. The narrative present is set in the future, in an improbable and unspecified time in our future, some 40 or 50 years after the love affair ended, and hence after reunification. The stories of the narrator's friends' marriages may therefore be intended to give a sense of social and historical context to a narrative that otherwise, due to the timeless quality of the love affair sequences, appears to quite deliberately make sparing use of concrete historical references or signposts.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, as will be argued here, these stories serve an important function at the level of metafiction, appearing as an extended metafictional metaphor or conceit about the gloomy future of German unification.

Maron's narrator tells us that, unlike most of her friends, she welcomed German unification enthusiastically as a miraculous liberation from the repressive old order, which was dominated by "die Willkür des Absurden" (AT 32) ("arbitrary absurdities" (ATE 14)). As the name indicates, the "year of liberation" opened up for her a whole new world of

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<sup>4</sup> For a perceptive discussion of the relevance of the lack of referentiality in relation to the central topic of memory see Andrea Geier, "Paradoxien des Erinnerns: Biographisches Erzählen in *Animal Triste*," in *Monika Maron in Perspective*, 103.

opportunities and possibilities. Above all, it liberated years of repressed desires and pent-up longings, which she now channels into one end: the desire to live the rest of her life as a love story, “als eine nicht endende, ununterbrochene Liebesgeschichte” (AT 13).<sup>5</sup> For the narrator, no break is radical enough, no upheaval cataclysmic enough to quench her thirst for change. While others sought refuge in the old and familiar, she unashamedly embraced the new. She cannot, for instance, understand her married friends, who instead of looking outward, turned back to one another for support:

Ehepaare, von denen ich geglaubt hatte, daß sie kaum mehr Worte wechselten, als der Alltag ihnen abverlangte, hielten sich plötzlich bei den Händen, wenn sie die Neuheiten der Stadt besichtigten; in ihren Blicken füreinander lag statt dumpfen Spotts, wie noch ein Jahr zuvor, dankbare Verschworenheit, Scheidungen, die schon eingereicht waren, wurden massenhaft zurückgenommen. Jeder griff blind neben sich und hielt fest, was er bis dahin sein eigen genannt hatte, auch das längst Verworfenene, von dem man schließlich nicht wissen konnte, ob es sich unter den neuen Verhältnissen nicht doch als nicht unnützt erweisen würde. (AT 90)<sup>6</sup>

One example of couples reforming can be seen in the exceptional East German couple, Karin and Klaus—the couple the narrator knew from childhood—who epitomized the young love the narrator claims she never had. Idealized and envied by her for achieving the seemingly impossible feat of attaining true and lasting happiness in love, Karin and Klaus had, however, become estranged by the time the Wall has fallen. Klaus had been smitten by a younger woman and was seeking a divorce. This only goes to prove to the narrator that Karin and Klaus were in fact not the perfect couple, not the “Liebespaar auf Leben und Tod” (AT 93)<sup>7</sup> everyone had thought them to be, but simply just another normal, fallible couple: “ein Ehepaar fürs Leben” (AT 93), as she had secretly suspected

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<sup>5</sup> “as a never-ending, unbroken love story” (ATE 3)

<sup>6</sup> “Married couples who, I had believed, barely spoke to each other beyond what their daily routine required, suddenly were seen hand in hand, sightseeing the new developments around town. The numb distain they had for each other the year before had been replaced by a flash of grateful complicity in their eyes. Divorce papers already filed were withdrawn in large numbers. Everybody groped blindly for what was near and held on to even long-discarded possessions. One could never tell, after all, what might prove still useful under the new circumstances.” (ATE 47)

<sup>7</sup> “lovers in life and death” (ATE 48)

all along.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore one of the ironies of history that just as Klaus and Karin were about to succumb to the “normal chaos of love” in evidence everywhere else in the modern world, even in the East, history intervened to save them.<sup>9</sup> Needless to say, Karin and Klaus are last seen after the Wall has fallen, standing hand in hand in front of a shop window on the Ku’damm. The upheavals of the times had revived their marriage and reinvigorated their relationship, if not with new eroticism, then at least with a new sense of companionship.

Rather ironically then, the effect of the intrusion of the political marriage of East and West into the literary marriage appears to be, in the short term at least, stronger and reinvigorated marriages between easterners. It would indeed seem as if the political marriage between East and West serves, in the first instance at least, as a centripetal force driving easterners back together again. Unification acts in many ways as a temporary panacea to individuals’ personal problems, to the point of overcoming alienation and reimbuing tired emotional bonds with fresh meaning and purpose. The East-East marriage provides something like the “haven in a heartless world” that Christopher Lasch speaks about in relation to the family in the western world in the seventies, a welcome haven from the challenges and uncertainties of social and political change.<sup>10</sup> Conceivably, marriage between easterners also serves, in the words of Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, as an “anchor of inner identity,” possibly even an anchor of East German identity, in the face of the weakening of socialist bonds and the intrusion of the belated effects of modernization and individualization.<sup>11</sup>

The phenomenon illustrated by Karin and Klaus is one that sociologist Karl Otto Hondrich argues is one of the wide-spread effects of continued individualization in a global world. While many individuals enter into relationships determined by choice rather than tradition, others are forced to reaffirm traditional ties in response to the individualized actions of others.<sup>12</sup> In other words, acts of choice often involve limiting the choice of others, and with the choices that people make about love, there are inevitably always wives and husbands that are left behind with very little choice, such as to stay with the children or to maintain the family. In short, the freedom of choice in love and interpersonal relationships—which encompasses the freedom to form relationships as well as to dissolve them

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<sup>8</sup> “married couple for life” (ATE 49)

<sup>9</sup> Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Das ganz normale Chaos der Liebe*.

<sup>10</sup> Lasch, *A Haven in a Heartless World*.

<sup>11</sup> Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Das ganz normale Chaos der Liebe*, 70.

<sup>12</sup> Hondrich, *Liebe in den Zeiten der Weltgesellschaft*, 51 ff.

with partners of personal choice and in living arrangements of one's own choice—always produces unfreedom and a return to tradition in its wake. Unfreedom, too, as Ate, the narrator's friend from the East, points out to her in another context, can for some also be a type of choice, a choice that is fuelled by the fear of freedom.

The other predominant interpersonal power effect of unification mentioned in the novel is the break-up of East-West marriages. There are three marriages in the novel that disprove the narrator's theory of unification as miraculously repairing marriages that are teetering on the rocks. These are, quite apart from the narrator's own marriage, which will be dealt with later, the three East-West relationships of her friends. For these couples unification clearly represents an interpersonal crisis, for the main reason that the search for happiness and self-fulfilment of one partner, or the individualization strategies of one individual, have caused them to seek new partners in love. The political marriage of East and West, it seems, has rather ironically had the effect of weakening East-West interpersonal bonds. It has, it could be argued, caused an imperceptible shift in the semantics of love between East and West Germans and in codes of communication. Above all, it has altered what Niklas Luhmann calls the degree and conditions of “interpersonal interpenetration” between lovers, between alter and ego, or between different personal systems of organization, and this is nowhere more noticeable than in marriages between East and West Germans.<sup>13</sup>

In all three East-West relationships the end of the “peculiar time” serves as the catalyst for the break-up of the couple. Even the perfect couple, Emile and Sibylle, who are described as “das schönste Ehepaar, das ich im Leben gesehen habe” (AT 44),<sup>14</sup> do not survive the collapse of the gang of liberationists. The roofer (“Dachdecker”) Emile, whose vitae bears an uncanny resemblance to the other roofer from the Sauerland who was head of the “liberationist gang,” namely Erich Honecker, falls in love with Sibylle, who runs a ballett boutique, during his permitted daily outings as a pensioner across the Wall to West Berlin. Their plans to move in together are rudely interrupted by the end of the reign of the liberation gang. Sibylle and he drift apart when Emile resumes his old habit of “hanging” around in the “Vorzimmer der Macht” (AT 45) (“antechambers of power” (ATE 21)), only this time he frequents the waiting rooms of one of the new democratically elected parties in the East. Needless to say,

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<sup>13</sup> Luhmann, *Liebe als Passion: Zur Codierung von Intimität*, 217.

<sup>14</sup> “the most beautiful couple I have ever seen in my life” (ATE 20)

neither Emile nor his love for Sibylle survive the new world order for long.

The relationship between Sibylle and Emile offers a good example of the difficulties of sustaining the degree of interpersonal interpenetration that is necessary after 1990 for love to be reproduced as a communications medium. The alliance between Emile and Sibylle, which was built around their entirely different but somehow complementary experiences of biographical rupture and forsaken dreams in their respective German states, was initially made possible and probable by an historical quirk of fate, namely the fact that East German pensioners like Emile were given special permission to travel to the West. With the removal of this historical condition, and the tearing down of the Wall, the relationship lost its basis in reality and its specific purpose and function. This can be seen in Sibylle's remark that suddenly she cannot understand Emile's passion for politics. Loss of understanding signals the breakdown of love as a communications medium, and a specifically East-West communications medium, since understanding forms an essential part of communicating with the other.<sup>15</sup> The circumstances that had helped Emile and Sibylle cope with or manage complexity and contingency, particularly political contingencies, and that had turned an improbability of them ever meeting into an everyday "normal improbability," and even a likelihood, and made them fall in love, no longer existed. The imagined symmetries in their biographies, which the Wall had possibly brought more sharply into relief, began to count for less once the Wall had fallen. Instead, old asymmetries re-asserted themselves, asymmetries which were partly due to the distinct nature of their respective eastern and western biographies. Ironically, it is passion of a different sort that comes between them, namely Emile's incomprehensible passion for the "antechambers of power." The previous areas of commonality between them, such as a shared belief in "nicht mehr erwartetes Glück" (AT 45) in love late in life, along with the idea of a second chance in love, fade into insignificance in the face of the fatal attraction of politics.<sup>16</sup> Even the shared bodily experience of rupture—Emile's broken breast bone from a heart operation and Sibylle's broken leg as a child which prevented her from becoming a ballerina—which mirror the breaks into their respective biographies—cannot provide enough commonality, and interpersonal interpenetration, to sustain their love after the historical "rupture" of the end of the freedom gang. Emile has no need for a mistress or lover like Sibylle to share his retirement

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<sup>15</sup> Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 198.

<sup>16</sup> "happiness that neither had thought possible" (ATE 21)

with, and he seeks instead a wife or companion to organise his life, linking up with an old East German friend. The effect is a curious East-West doubling of women in Emile’s life, which emerges only at his funeral:

Er besann sich auf eine ehemalige Freundin, die ihn betreut hatte, als er todkrank war, und die nun während der schlaflosen Wochen des Wahlkampfes und der ersten Zeit nach der Amtsübernahme die Organisation seines physischen Lebens übernahm: Sie wusch Emilés Hemden, kochte ihm auch nachts noch eine Suppe und rief den Arzt, als er starb. So kam es, dass an Emilés offenem Grab zwei Witwen standen: die erstarrte Sibylle mit einem großen Strauß roter Rosen und die ehemalige Freundin, von den Rednern angesprochen “als liebe Frau Wagner,” während Sibylle unerwähnt blieb, mit einem Strauß weißer Rosen. (AT 48)<sup>17</sup>

There are two further East-West relationships mentioned in the novel that predate unification: the relationship between Ate and Ali and the marriage of Rainer and Anke. Curiously both of them suffer the same fate as the affair between Emile and Sibylle. Neither outlasts the reign of the repressive “liberation gang”; or rather, neither survives the transition to freedom. The political marriage between East and West has rather paradoxically dissolved all the existing East-West marriages in the novel. The reasons for this also have to do with the conditional, provisional nature of the relationships, which were dependent on the extraordinary historical and political circumstances of pre-unification times. The liaison between Ali and Ate was the product of geo-politics and West Berlin’s peculiar status as a hermetically sealed political “foreign body” or island within the GDR. Ali, who was dodging childcare payments in West Berlin, chose to live with Ate in the GDR rather than face charges in the West:

Da im Stadtbezirk Charlottenburg gerade wieder ein Verfahren wegen nicht gezahlter Alimente gegen ihn anhängig war, beschloß er, lieber bei

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<sup>17</sup> “He remembered a former girlfriend who had taken care of him when he was in death’s throes before, and who assumed responsibility for the everyday practical organization of his life during the sleepless weeks of the election campaign and immediately after the mayor took office. She washed Emile’s shirts, cooked soup for him even at night, and called the doctor when he was dying. Thus it came about that two widows stood at Emile’s open grave: Sybille, numb and with a huge bouquet of red roses in her hands, and the former girlfriend, whom the speakers addressed as “dear Mrs. Wagner” while Sybille was left unmentioned.” (ATE 23)

Ate hinter der Mauer zu bleiben, als wieder einmal hinter den Gefängnismauern von Moabit (AT 134).<sup>18</sup>

The unique set of political and legal circumstances created its own range of choices in matters of the heart, its own form of “Selektionszwang” (“selection compulsion”) or the need to make meaningful selections in the face of overpowering choice.<sup>19</sup> Ali had a choice between a life with prison walls but *without* love/Ate and a life with political walls *with* love/Ate. His decision to stay in the GDR with Ate was moreover most likely helped by a belief in the timeless power of love to transcend such hardships as living behind national walls. Love thus becomes a human effect of geopolitics.

The East-West couple, Rainer and Anke, were also brought together by dint of historical and political circumstance. Anke had helped Rainer defect to the West, paying an organisation that smuggles defectors out of the East from an inheritance. The couple remained married in the West for fifteen years. It was only with the fall of the Wall that Rainer realises that Anke’s act of rescuing him had provided the primary and sole condition for their staying together. He realizes that he loved Anke above all “wegen ihres Rettungspotentials” (AT 169).<sup>20</sup> Once he had admitted that there was possibly a correlation between “das Maß der Verliebtheit” and “die wenn zunächst nur vage Aussicht auf eine Flucht” (AT 169) there was no further rationale for their staying together.<sup>21</sup> Before the Wall had fallen, for Rainer freedom was dependent on a West German woman, and the price he payed for his liberation was gratitude, love and faithfulness to his rescuer. After the Wall had fallen love, which had been a “political technology” of survival, now required new techniques for altogether different times.

The only exemplar of an East-West relationship forming after unification in the novel is the central affair between Franz and the narrator. Although the relationship between Emile and Sibylle prefigures in some ways the affair between Franz and the narrator, the main affair of the

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<sup>18</sup> “Since new proceedings for failure to pay alimony were just in the works against him at the municipal court in Charlottenburg, he decided he’d rather stay with Ata behind the wall than face the prison walls of Moabit again.” (ATE 73)

<sup>19</sup> According to Luhmann, the complexity of social systems can only be mastered via selection, that is, via the compulsion to make a selection, and hence reduce complexity. He describes this “Selektionszwang” however in terms of freedom. See Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 291.

<sup>20</sup> “because of her rescuing potential” (ATE 93)

<sup>21</sup> “the degree of his falling in love” “the prospect of being able to flee, even if vague at first” (ATE 93)

novel is unparalleled in the time after unification. The narrator's previous marriage to an easterner is similarly without comparison. Rather curiously, the narrator's marriage is the only exception to the rule established by the East German couples who rediscover companionship in the course of the transition to the new order. At the time of meeting Franz, the narrator tells us she had been married for twenty years and had a daughter. However, the narrator never discloses the real circumstances surrounding the end of her East German marriage, which simply seems to dissolve into thin air. Moreover, what makes the end of the narrator's marriage even more puzzling is the fact that there is no mention made of external social factors (such as unemployment) or of psychological or emotional reasons for separating (such as loss of passion or betrayal). We are told initially that her husband must have simply disappeared out of her life: "mein Ehemann muß ... unauffällig aus meinem Leben verschwunden sein" (AT 20), and later that the narrator most probably left him.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the narrator surprises us when she assures the reader that her husband was, as far as she can remember, "ein sympathischer und friedlicher Mensch" (AT 20).<sup>23</sup> We are led to believe that the reasons for the failure of her marriage have to do with choice and the discovery of the value of love, although the moment of first contact under the brachiosaurus is described, ironically, as a moment of divine intervention or fate, and as a random, unforeseen event: "Franz traf ich ein Jahr danach. Ich habe ihn nicht gesucht, und ich habe ihn nicht erwartet" (AT 23-24).<sup>24</sup> And yet the meeting with Franz appears to be far from a random event. For instance, we learn that the Natural History Museum, where the narrator works, is in the process of being taken over, and that Franz is overseeing the transition. Of course what had altered were the political, economic and social co-ordinates underpinning the relationship, the possibilities and contingencies, which the code of love in both Germanys is designed to control and manage, had changed, and inevitably too, the coding or semantics of love had shifted. Since the rules governing marriage, like the rules of love, are a response to the problem of contingency, if contingencies alter, then so too must the code and, logically, also human actions and feelings. Love is, as Luhmann claims in *Liebe als Passion (Love as Passion)*, first and foremost a communications medium and not a feeling. It functions according to a code that creates more or less invisible rules for forming, expressing and

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<sup>22</sup> "My husband must have discretely vanished from my life after I met Franz" (ATE 7)

<sup>23</sup> "a personable and quiet man" (ATE 7)

<sup>24</sup> "A year later I met Franz. I had not been searching for him, nor had I been waiting for him" (ATE 9)