

German Unification: Concepts of Identity in Poetry from the East and West¹

Introduction

In the period immediately following the fall of the Berlin wall, writers East and West turned to poetry as a genre for expressing their grasp of what German unification would mean for individual and national identity.² The sudden popularity of this genre may come as no surprise to such critics as Harald Hartung, Walter Erhart, Erk Grimm and Ruth Owen, who have recognized that poetry conveys a subjective immediacy and functions as signpost for personal, often intensely spontaneous, responses to social and historical upheaval (Hartung 181; Erhart 145; Grimm 123; Owen, *Poet's Role* 14).³ Viewing poetry as a type of litmus test for such responses, this paper examines the positioning of lyrical voices in representative poems written and published in Germany during the early 1990s. My analysis illuminates the way East and West German writers attempt to reconfigure their own and their country's identity in the wake of this largely unforeseen event—the unification of two Germanies whose citizens had lived for forty years in disparate political, social, and economic circumstances.

Scholarship on literary treatments of identity in this period generally focuses on novelistic fiction (e.g., Riordan; Parks; Peitsch; Soldat; Bremer).⁴ The few studies that do address poetic works are largely restricted to one particular poet.⁵ Broader analyses of poetic responses to unification in East and West Germany have concentrated mostly on establishing the degree to which such writing can be viewed as distinctly

"East" or "West." Katrin Kohl, for example, assesses the implications of heteroglossia—the differing uses of quotation and cliché in East and West German poetry—in establishing two distinct poetic traditions. Judith Ryan looks at GDR poetry after the two major historical disruptions, 1945 and 1989, as acts of repression.⁶ Similarly, Karen Leeder focuses on East German poetry as a "voice of opposition" to official GDR language ("Gegensprache" 413) and the effect of unification on the dynamics of such oppositional poetry.⁷ Ruth Owen examines poetic responses of both older and younger former GDR poets to the loss of their central status and role as mediator between state and people. Arguing for a particular type of unified poetic tradition that exists in spite of dual nationalities, Axel Goodbody notes parallels in East and West German poetry, but only with regard to "Ökolyrik" as a concern common to both East and West German culture (378).⁸

To my knowledge, only the works of Max Noordhoorn and Walter Erhart explore the treatment of identity issues in poems written during the period of unification. Both base their arguments on two poetry anthologies dealing with the prospects of a united Germany published in rapid succession in the early 1990s. Of these anthologies, *Grenzfalldgedichte: Eine deutsche Anthologie* (1991), edited by Anna Chiarloni and Helga Panke, presents mainly East German perspectives before and immediately after unification, while Karl Otto Conrady's *Von einem Land und vom andern: Gedichte zur Deutschen Wende* (1993) represents both East and West German authors. Since Max Noord-

hoorn's analysis focuses on the collection *Grenzfallgedichte*, he is chiefly concerned with the Eastern perspective as expression of loss, alienation, and disorientation. Though it is the only scholarly reference to Conrady's collection of poets from both East and West, Erhart's analysis nonetheless focuses largely on East German poets with particular attention given to the East German Durs Grünbein. In Erhart's view, the poems in Conrady's anthology function as a form of "Psychotherapie, in der Verlufterfahrungen bearbeitet, kompensiert und bewältigt werden" (153). In short, while most critics emphasize the underlying feeling of disjunction and dispossession in the lyrical voice, especially with regard to the East German individual, no critical analysis has examined in what way post-unification poetry represents identity in East and West Germany.⁹ Even in the recent special issue of the *Germanic Review* devoted exclusively to German poetry after the Wall, the subject of identity in response to post-wall changes does not appear in the editor's list of "central concerns characterizing German poetry today" (Eskin4).

This study strives to fill that gap by comparing the East German Jürgen Rennert's poem "Mein Land ist mir zerfallen" with the West German Karl Krolow's "Von einem Land und vom andern."¹⁰ My analysis commences with a text-linguistic interpretation contrasting the position of lyrical voices vis-a-vis their constructs of individual and national identity and their reflections on the function of the national past. Following Roman Jakobson's analysis of parallelism and the use of personal pronouns in Brecht's poem "Wir sind sie" (107-28), I illustrate how Krolow's West German poem applies third-person pronouns in presenting the alienation of the two German states due to their diverging histories, whereas Rennert's East German poem employs first person pronouns to point to a (problematic) relationship between the individual and the State (old and new). These features are further accompanied by repetition, parallelism, and anaphora, all of which I consider deictic in

that they are elements of a discourse which direct the reader's attention to the issues of self definition and nationhood as salient concerns in the "lyrical narrative" of the poems.¹¹ Following a close reading of these two poems, I turn to the larger East-West discourse represented especially in Conrady's anthology, analyzing dissimilar perspectives in the poetic and historical context that renders their differences representative.¹² Finally, I consider the way depictions of the self and "the other" in these poems represent perspectives worthy of our consideration today.

The two poems I have chosen as case studies exemplify central conflicts facing both Germanies after the fall of the wall, but in distinctly different ways. By focusing on the past relationship between speaker and country, the East German Jürgen Rennert's "Mein Land ist mir zerfallen" (see app.) expresses the speaker's lament for a painful loss. Since the GDR functions here as a mother figure who gave birth to and raised him and with whom he identifies both externally ("Mein Land trägt meine Züge," 17) and internally ("Ich bin die große Lüge / des Landes," 19-20), the nation's disintegration is equated with a breakdown of the poet's identity. By contrast, the West German Karl Krolow's "Von einem Land und vom andern" (see app.) does not deal with the interconnection between an individual and his country, but instead views the relationship between the two Germanies as one of fundamental alienation and ongoing division within the unified country.¹³ Unlike Rennert, Krolow does envision though only conditionally—a harmonious future (ll. 17-21). The elegiac quality, the emphasis on personal loss, and the focus on the past in the East German poem thus contrasts with the West German poem's more hopeful outlook, its emphasis on collective rather than personal identity, and its concern for the future as well as the present.

Personal and Impersonal Perspectives on Individual and National Identity

In Rennert's "Mein Land ist mir zerfallen," the preoccupation with individual identity is reflected in the recurrence of first-person pronouns throughout, as well as in the shift from the first-person singular to the plural in the last stanza ("Wir meint: ich"). The anaphoric repetition of the possessive pronoun "Mein [Land]" in connection with other first-person pronouns ("mir," "mich") in the first line of each stanza reiterates the close interpersonal relationship between speaker and country. Furthermore, the dative reflexive "mir zerfallen" indicates the speaker's identification with the breakdown of the country. Thus, initially the reader might construe the use of the neutral genitive article "des [Landes]" instead of the possessive "mein[es]" as the subject's attempt to distance himself from his loss in order to gain stability. However, his distance crumbles with the subsequent first mention of a collective "wir" in the brackets that conclude the poem. The disintegration of the collective into the individual "ich" mirrors the breakdown of the country, traces of which, however, remain etched in the lives of its former citizens (cf. Erhart 148; Owen, *Poet's Role* 276--84).

This shift from collective to individual is further underscored by a parallel change of tense from past to present. Reflecting on the past in all but the last stanza, the speaker defines his identity with reference to the no longer existent GDR, thus revealing a correspondence between the loss of the country and the discontinuity of the subject. In spite of the shift to the present tense in the last stanza, then, the speaker cannot envision a new concept of self apart from that of this country. His continuing identification both with its internal ("Lüge," 19) and its external constitution ("Mein Land trägt meine Züge / die Züge tragen mich," 17-18) further stresses his difficulty in constructing a private identity separate from the public one.¹⁴

In contrast with the prevalence of first person pronouns in Rennert's poem, the reader finds none at all in Krolow's. While Rennert's use of personal pronouns underlines the filial-maternal relationship between individual and country, the reference to people with the impersonal pronoun "man" in the West German poem not only indicates a distanced relationship between people and country, but also among people themselves. This lack of identification is corroborated by the use of rhyme word repetition, both as the poem's subject and as a reflection of its subjective perspective. Conspicuously, it is precisely the word "Gesicht" (2) that is not repeated as rhyme word in the second stanza, while the remaining rhyme words of the first stanza reappear in the second ("Hände" [1; 15], "Ende" [3; 13], "nicht" [4 and 7; 16], "fände" [5; 12], "Gewicht" [6; 14]). By leaving only "Gesicht" without a match, the poem emphasizes the failure of an identity-constituting persona on both sides. Furthermore, the attempt to ascertain personal identity with the help of body language ("Hände," 1) becomes a gesture of desperation in the second stanza ("Über alles ringt man die Hände ...," 15). These visual images of alienation are followed by the disappearance of the speaker himself, who literally hides in his poetry in the last five lines.¹⁵ It is not the poet, but the future poem which he imagines as speaking ("*das* ruhig von beiden spricht," 19 [my italics]). The use of the indicative here emphasizes the secure presence of the future poem, while the conditional ("verschwände," 17, and "fürchtete," 21) refers to the poet, testifying to his still overarching anxiety.

As indicated by the use of pronouns in Rennert's poem, national identity in the East German perspective is inseparable from individual identity and vice versa. By contrast, the West German poem implies no such connections; references to a personal subject are concealed by the impersonal collective. Even the one mention of an individual face ("Gesicht," 2) refers to the other Germany ("Deutschland am anderen En-

de," 3) and to an undefined collective ("man," 4), rather than to an individual. Thus, whereas the focus of the East German poem is the deprivation of the past self resulting from the loss of national identity, the main concern of the West German poem is the search for a future national identity. In other words, while Krolow seeks to redefine the country's self-consciousness, Rennert is at once faced with the forfeiture of his old identity and the absence of a viable alternative.¹⁶ Consequently, the use of deixis in Rennert's poem signals the identification of each individual with the (lost) country, whereas in Krolow's poem it demonstrates the lack of communication between individuals.

However, these two different functions of pronouns have one common effect. Just as the impersonal "man" in the West German poem suggests a depersonalized society in the unified country, the emphasis on the first person in the East German poem discloses the individual's feeling of isolation even from other former GDR citizens. The dissolution of the country—and thus, by implication, of its espoused values of equality and solidarity—leads to the subject's realization of the loneliness of each individual. The subjective immediacy of a poetic voice is used in both poems to locate and define a position for a political, speaking subject for which no political discourse exists.¹⁷ In other words, in communicating a critique of national identity from an embodied, experiential point of view, both poems formulate a still unrealized new, speaking subject, the psychological-political subject of a new state.

Both speakers thus function as token representatives of a class of psychological realities that will be critical for the politics and subjectivity of post-unification Germany. It should be emphasized, however, that the poems underscore the ultimate isolation and alienation of the individual for distinctly different reasons. In the GDR lyric, the loss of national identity is a burden each former citizen has to bear alone. In the West German poem, the problem of unification is pre-

sented as a collective alienation. Largely through the varying use of deixis in these poems, two different identity conflicts emerge. The East German poem emphasizes the isolation of the individual confronted with both the invalidated old identity and the impossibility of defining himself through reference to something other than this lost past. The lyrical voice in the West German poem conveys the impersonal, alienating nature of unification, in which people have no say and lack a sense of integration and belonging ("gemeinsames Wir-Bewußtsein," Schönfeld, cited in Müller 135).

But while the West German Krolow is concerned with alienated factions within the newly unified country, for Rennert divisiveness lies within himself, that is, in the necessity for adopting a new identity even as the old, now invalid one continues to define him as an individual. Predictably, then, the East German poem ends with the disintegration of the collective "wir" into the insecure, isolated presence of the emerging individual "ich." In contrast, the West German poem ends with the vanishing of the anguished speaker and an impersonal voice articulating a future vision of balance and equality between the two countries.¹⁸ In other words, while the issue of identity in the East German poem is posed as a personal dilemma, in the West German poem it is framed as a collective problem. Although the separation of the private and the public spheres and the lack of a collective sense of belonging may result in the alienation of an individual for the West German poet, it does not affect the subject's personal identity in the way it does the East German for whom the loss of national identity results in a disjunction of the self. In Krolow's poem, unification merges two divergent communities, creating potentially divisive *social* tensions, while in the poem from the East, unification produces divisive *personal* tensions between a former citizen's sense of self concomitant with his sense of his former nation.

Two Perspectives on the Past: Personal Memory vs. Collective Tradition

These two divergent concepts of identity, one a social tension, the other personal, mirror how memories and functions of the past in the two Germanies necessarily constructed different answers to the question "who am I?" In both East and West, individual and national identities experienced discontinuities after 1989. The newly unified Germany lacked "transmission of the past into the present" (Ryan, "Deckname" 39) and a "sense of sameness over time and space" (Gillis 3). Consequently, neither Rennert nor Krolow can anchor his lyrical identity with a reference to a common past or tradition as meaningful orientation for a unified future. But while the West German poem addresses the way human emotions are overridden by pragmatic political exigencies, Rennert's poem centers on the break with the immediate GDR past and its problematic but idealistic value system. Consequently, while both poets use the same technique of employing modified phrase regimens as quotations or wordplay to evoke the states' language of authority (cf. Bourdieu 137-59), the message is focused on personal implications in Rennert and on transindividual ones in Krolow.

Attempting to come to terms with the loss of an intimate personal relationship, the speaker in "Mein Land ist mir zerfallen" deploys phrase regimens involving puns on birth and child-rearing to picture the close if complicated connection between self and country. This imagery, however, appears in reversed order, from "verzogen" (9), referring to a younger child, to "an die Brust gepreßt" (14), a reference to a baby, to "kam [...] nieder" (15), that is, giving birth. In connection with the double meanings of "verzogen" and "niederkommen," this reversal mirrors the relationship between the country's literal distortion of the *Volk* (their "up-bringing" as immature, dependent children) and its own downfall, its "niederkommen."

Paradoxically, then "niederkommen" as the birth of an individual, or individuality, is equated in the GDR with "niederkommen" as the demise of the country. The word play in the repetition of "Züge" (17), features and trains, epitomizes the disjunction between external change in the adoption of a new national identity and the permanent "family features" which indelibly mark both character and physical traits.

The ongoing attachment, ("Mit mir, der es nicht läßt," 16) and the gnomic statement "Wir meint: ich" suggest Rennert's semantic isolation given the impossibility of identifying with something other than the conflicted, but shared GDR past. Consequently, nowhere does he refer to a common all-German past. Preoccupied with the nullification of the immediate history of the GDR and its effect on the individual, the lyrical voice uses metaphors to argue that it is this specifically GDR past, not a trans-German one, which plays a constitutive role in the formation of both national and individual identity. In other words, the speaker locates his selfhood in a personal past relationship that is deplored as irrevocably lost. This sense of loss and mourning and the concern with personal biography is not an isolated case, but reflects the perspective of a larger corpus of East German poems. 19

Rennert's lamentation of a lost interpersonal past contrasts with the West German poem's search for a collective history or tradition from which to reconstruct the present and build a harmonious future. Here, the rhyme word repetitions of "Ende" (3; 13) and "Gewicht" (6; 14) and the repeated reference to the text of Hoffman von Fallersleben's national anthem (5; 15) comprise the primary indexes of this search. In both stanzas, the reiteration of the same modified phrase regimen "Deutschland am anderen Ende" emphasizes the separateness of the two states. Moreover, since in both stanzas, "Gewicht" (6) is linked to the national anthem (5--6 and 14-15), its recurrence connects the invalidity of the past ("ohne Gewicht," 6) to the different experiences and

value systems ("anderes Gewicht," 14) of the two German states. The repetition of "Über alles" (5; 15) stresses the lack of a common reference point. Dismissed already in the first mention as invalid, the national anthem—a 19th-century text has been appropriated for varying political purposes at varying points in Germany's history—that becomes an expression of desperation ("über alles ringt man die Hände," 15) in the second stanza. Instead of national consensus, helplessness and despair reign supreme. Not the past itself, only its creative revision in a potential future poem, holds out hope for a unified country ("... es sei denn man verschwände/in einem andern Gedicht,/ das ruhig von beiden spricht ...," 17-19).

The meaning, indeed the very constitution of the past is thus different in the two poems. While the West German poet underscores the need to recover and recompose unifying elements from a common tradition, the East German sees the threat unification poses to *his* GDR past and tradition as a threat to his personal identity. Because he is forced to adopt a new identity, the East German poet is concerned with the preservation of his endangered self rather than with the recovery of an identity based on a reconstituted German community.²⁰ In other words, what to Rennert is loss and the desire to preserve is a process of recovery and restoration from Krolow's West German perspective. The past that meant division is to be overcome, something lost is to be recovered, and the break with the past to be healed. In East Germany, something *is* lost and a past *is* broken and invalidated. In short, the view of the past as personal loss contrasts with the West German future-oriented search for a common past as potential completion or healing mechanism. The painful sense of dissolution and breakdown in Rennert's poem stands in stark contrast to the hopeful note of future unity and coherence in Krolow's poem.

Historians Laurence McFalls (299-305) and Robert Moeller (esp. 99-101), among others, have examined these different orientations in popular culture and political deci-

sions as indicative of different identity constructs after WW II. Whereas West German identity established itself not by reference to the soon rejected Nazi past, but through capitalist values, the economic miracle, and modern technology, in East Germany the national identity taught in schools, work cadres, and popular media promoted the GDR as a state where a capitalist-fascist past could be overcome with the practice of social equality and collective effort (cf. Koonz).²¹ In the postwar FRG, as Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich have argued, the repression of the former allegiances and ideals during National Socialism left many people unable to identify with anything but the economic system (38). Allowable memories of the past were private and selective, thereby preventing FRG citizens from establishing "collective identities that could bind West Germans together socially and politically, creating an 'imagined community'" (Moeller 99). In the GDR, though, the "intrusion of the State in virtually every aspect of the existence" (Noordhoorn 113) and the emphasis on solidarity and equality led to the sheer impossibility of developing an independent, autonomous individual identity.²² Gerhard Müller has shown how these divergent identities are mirrored even in everyday language (120-30) and in the communication styles (131-33), not only during the division, but also in the years following unification. As a result of the persistence of different concepts of the self and its roots, these problems of communication persist even in the 21st century (cf. Klein).

The East-West Discourse in Poetry Anthologies

The two different perspectives on individual and national identity and the past, and their portrayal through the use of deixis and modified phrase regimens reemerge throughout the aforementioned anthologies. Written two years before unification, Heidenreich's "ITanusland" (Chiarloni/Pan-

koke 34) confirms Rennert's need to identify with his country's past. Envisioning a train trip from one *Heimat* to the other, the speaker experiences a doubling of self ("Gedoppelt sitzt du dir jetzt gegenüber," 24) emphasized by the use of the second person (*du*) throughout.²³ Furthermore, the journey of the doubled speaker through the Janus-faced country becomes itself two-directional. Repeating elements of the first stanza in mirror-like reversed order in the third ("Fahrkarten," 2--"Kaffee," 4--"Flieht," 6 vs. "Fliehende Landschaft," 25--"Kaffee," 26--"Fahrkarten," 26), the speaker indicates the impossibility of leaving one identity behind when traveling to the *second Heimat*. This doubling is further problematized by the laconic label "Schwarzfahrt" in the last line, indicating that the identity of the self traveling towards the second *Heimat* is invalid ("Gedoppelt sitzt du dir jetzt gegenüber: Die / Fliehende Landschaft betrachtend, / Kaffee, die Fahrkarten bitte--der / Zweiten entgegenrasend: Schwarzfahrt," 25--27). Both Heidenreich's and Rennert's poems thus point to the conflict between two *Heimaten* and the paradoxical self-definition through a country defined by "Schwarzfahrt" and "Lüge," respectively.

At the same time, neither lyricist's voice can envision the possibility of constituting himself in reference to something other than his country.²⁴ Forfeiting an identity with the "new" Germany; Rennert sees himself only in terms of the GDR. A similar stance is implicit in former GDR poet Lutz Rathenow's "Deutschland" (Conrady; *Gedichtbuch* 1180; written 1991),²⁵ whose playful conclusion ("neuer Staat, neues Gedicht. Spiele, / ich spiele gern: zu-zu-Zuversicht") portrays poetry as last potential vehicle for a counter-identity of protest against assimilation, hidden under a seeming adaptation (cf. Leeder; Emmerich 514). The imposition of a new poetic identity of "games" is doubly used in the final word play. First, the rhythm is reminiscent of the protest slogans of leftist anti-Vietnam demonstrations of the 68ers ("Ho-Ho-Ho Tschì-minh"), thus underlining

resistance to "Western imperialism." Second, if read as stammering, the line points to the poet's lingering doubts and reluctance rather than the expressed confidence, about a new poetic face. Rathenow, unlike Rennert, uses the modified phrase regimen to highlight the conflict between individual and the political and economic decisions, but his final emphasis is similarly the fate of the individual (poet).

Conflicting allegiances and a resultant loneliness are also conveyed in Barbara Köhler's "Rondeau Allemagne" (cited in Emmerich 515), which reflects on the breakup of an erotic relationship and its aftermath.²⁶ Through repeated modifications of phrase regimens that pun on syntax and semantics in "fremd (gehen)" and "Grenzen," Köhler pinpoints the conflict between love, betrayal, self-abnegation and alienation: "Ich harre aus im Land und geh, ihm fremd / Mit einer Liebe, die mich über Grenzen treibt / [. ..] / Ich harre aus im Land und geh im fremd" Cll. 1-4). Just as Rennert finds himself faced with the forfeiture of an intimate mother-son relationship, so does Köhler end with the irrevocable separation of two erotic partners and the awareness of the individual's utter isolation in the aftermath of a *Seitensprung* with and to the FRG. Like the three male authors, Köhler is unable to envision a positive identity in the future she is confronting. Yet, while the male speakers portray themselves as passive subjects of changes imposed from "without" and reflect on the repercussions these have for the individual (poet), the female voice points more readily to her own (active) participation in betrayal and desertion. However, rather than emancipation and self-determination, the new role as woman in an atomized society evokes an abysmal void: "Kein Land in Sicht ... / zwischen den Himmeln. Sehe jeder, wo er bleibt." (ll. 11-12).

While these East German poets all depict the disruption of a once stable identity; West German poets join Krolow in his focus on the impersonal state and its alienating, dehumanizing impact on its citizens. One exam-

ple is the opposition of "alles" vs. "ich" in Hans-Ulrich Treichel's ".Am Brandenburger Tor" (Conrady, *Gedichtbuch* 1193; originally 1990). Similar to Krolow's poem, Treichel's ends with the ultimate disappearance of the speaker, as the opposition of "alles" vs. "ich" in the first two stanzas becomes one of "alles" plus "Raben" vs. "meinlen]Vers." No longer present as a person, the speaker here seems to be hiding in his verse much like the speaker in Krolow. Likewise, the first-person pronoun in Jochen Kelter's "Deutsche Frage" (Conrady, *Wende* 104-05; originally 1992) disappears after the first line (and word), only to be replaced by third-person plural pronouns (mostly the pejorative "die" repeated five times) which mark the distance between individual and collective, and stress a complete lack of concern for the individual. The question of what unification means for the individual ("wer ...?" lines 27, 28), emphasized by its anaphoric repetition, remains unanswered, thus exposing unification as a politically and economically motivated exploitation.²⁷

E. A. Richter in "Deutsch Land" (Conrady, *Wende* 102) also opposes the impersonal, inhuman State ("es gibt ...," lines 5, 6, 7) and the individual ("ich," lines 13, 18, 21). But he goes further in connecting unification to colonialism, thereby accentuating the repressive nature of the political and material exploitation. The simultaneous reference to Hitler's expansionist politics ("es gibt schon wieder ein Volk / ohne Raum es gibt eine Zweidrittel- / gesellschaft samt Kolonialismus," 6--8) draws a direct line from colonialism to National Socialism to unification, thereby suggesting that the roots of the current problems lie in the heterogeneous experiences and concepts of major periods in German history.²⁸ Similarly, some of the songwriters analyzed by Richard Rundell directly link unification to a growing receptiveness to National Socialist thought (160ff.). In his "Deutschland, Deutschland unter andern ..." (1991), the songwriter Stählin writes: "Denn die Kälte kommt von innen / und kommt nicht aus der Türkei, / laßt uns also

neu besinnen, / was die deutsche Heimat sei. / Daß man warm im Neste sitze / und im Land ..." (cited in Rundell 164).

These West German writers are not alone in castigating nationalist notions of homeland and nationhood. Yet, as opposed to Richter's and Stählin's linear model of history, which allows for and encourages change, the past in former GDR poet Lutz Rathenow's "Deutschland" becomes a circular, multiply interconnected *collage* of Catholicism, National Socialism, and Communism ("Grüß Heil! Sieg Front! Rot Gott!").²⁹ Unlike Rennert, then, he is concerned with collective pasts, which he interprets as abuse of the weak individual implied in the ironical wordplay "Ich liebe Herren, die Hunde beißen"). Exploiting the gap between phonological similarity and semantic difference in the juxtaposition of the GDR's past and presence ("Ährenkranz, / Totentanz," 3-4), Rathenow's incisive transformation of the former GDR symbols, underlined by the line-break with rhyme, portrays the radical, unexpected change its citizens are facing. Like Rennert he uses phrase regimens to link the death of one state to the forced adoption of a new (poetic) identity ("neuer Staat, neues Gedicht," 6).³⁰

Conversely, the West German use of phrase regimens invalidates not the personal, but the collective past. For example, in the West German Treichel's ".Am Brandenburger Tor" the German self-definition as *Volk der Dichter und Denker* is rendered meaningless: "Deutschland Deutschland unter anderem/Bröckelt deine Denkerstirn" (3-4).³¹ Furthermore, here, as in Krolow's poem, the national anthem is reduced to an expression of helplessness; for Treichel, the hymn becomes a squawk of ravens, birds of death. By contrast, when East German poems refer to a national anthem, it is generally that sung in the former GDR. The anthem is parodied in Stefan Döring's, where the original ".Aufgestanden aus Ruinen" is replaced by "aufgestanden und ruiniert" (Conrady, *Wende*, 52). The seeming identity of past and future ("neuer vergangenheit

zugewandt / heult in zukunfft ruinen" [3-4]) effectively portrays the speaker's conflict between "verordnetem Aufbruch und subjektiver Endzeiterl'ahrung" (Erhart 149).

In short, while West German poets concentrate on the common problem of "*^krganheitsbewältigung*, East German poets shift attention to the personal dilemma of the poetic subject.³² This existential predicament and the conflict between the individual's past and present/future reemerge repeatedly in East German poetry, while West German poets look to history as potential (if negative) point of orientation in the re-composition of the present and future. East Germans deplore the invalidation of their former State's "symbolic capital-prestige, charisma, charm-and the relations of exchange through which this capital accumulates [...]" (Bourdieu 128). West Germans, on the other hand, "expose and disenchant" theirs, thereby discrediting a public discourse based on its authority. The poetic rendering of these issues through deictic markers (especially pronouns, repetitions and rhyme) and other recontextualized speech elements, disjunctive and displaced semantic elements from previous worlds of discourse, identify the speakers as either personally involved, involuntary protagonists (East), or witness and analyst (West).³³

These poetic views of the cognitive structures and costs of unification for the individual contrast sharply not only with the popular euphoria when the Berlin wall fell, but also with the soon prevalent stereotypes about the "other" ("Besserwessi," "3"ammerossi," "Westpack," "Zonendödel," etc., cf. Müller 131-35), and with the subsequent rise of xenophobic hostilities. These trends characterizing the period following unification have been related to a clash between different East and West German value systems (cf. Rundell; Swaffar; McFalls 303). Public reactions to Christa Wolf's story "Was bleibt" epitomize such disjunctures (see Anz). As Günter Grass emphasized, many of Wolf's West German critics demanded that she efface her personal history as well as her public

role as a representative writer of the GDR (Grass, "Nötige Kritik?"; Anz). This disregard for the different pasts and the failure on the part of the West to confront this problem sympathetically has been compared to the situation of West Germans after 1945. Just as FRG citizens rapidly repressed their past and former identification with National Socialism soon after 1945, identifying instead with the "Siegermentalität" of the Allies (Anz 219; see also Mitscherlich 46), GDR citizens in 1990 were expected to reject their former beliefs and see only the failings of their social system (Schirrmacher in Anz 257; see also Peitsch 174). As the East German poetry testifies, however, the parallel between the impoverishment of the self (Mitscherlich 35) after Hitler's death and after the demise of the GDR fails to hold up to closer examination of the cognitive and psychic configuration of the new poetic and political subject of a reunified state. The denial of Hitler as collective "ich-Ideal" (Mitscherlich 34) contrasts starkly with poetic evocations of the GDR as a flawed but persistent component of individual identity among East Germans.

In their skepticism about public representations, both Rennert's and Krolow's poems typify two lyrical stances of East and West German poems in the early 1990s. In addressing the identity threat posed by West German demands for complete adoption of western views and behaviors, Rennert's poem exemplifies the East German's anxiety about effacing a conflicted, but real past. The lack of any direct reference to life in the new Germany, and of continuity between the cognitive experience of the GDR past and the unified future underscores the speaker's "dread of writing in a void" (Owen, "Ex-GDR Poet" 491). In a world that provides him no poetic stance as a speaking subject contiguous with that of his past, a past increasingly under attack, the subject retreats onto the personal memories (Owen, *Poet's Role* 275-79).

Rennert's poem thus points to the disjuncture between an East German need to

keep the past alive by telling about it, and a West German lack of interest in these autobiographies (cf. Emmerich 524). In so doing, Rennert highlights the costs---cognitive, social, and psychological---for the individual, as well as the need to create a new position for a speaking subject. By the same token, Krolow's poem acknowledges the need to validate East as well as West German senses of self as integral to any new German identity. His rhyme word repetitions and the use of mostly "a" and "b" rhymes throughout evoke a counterbalance to the experience of disunity and alienation through rhetorical harmonies, as in the German expression "sich einen Reim machen," that is, to make sense of something by joining sounds and semantics. And it is the break with these "a" and "b" rhymes only in those lines explicitly concerned with "otherness" (11 and 20-21) that further highlights the need for a relationship of equality and shared understanding. Concluding the poem with two balancing couplets, the poem provides a final poetic resolution to the altercation and variance evoked in the alternating rhyme scheme of lines 1-5 and 17.³⁴

While none of the poems I have discussed here present a solution for the psychological and social problems posed by unification, they help the reader recognize and pinpoint some of the reasons for and effects of the disparate identity constructs that still prevail.³⁵ Their divergent perspectives on identity and the past invite reconsiderations of the meaning and implications of unification. Strikingly similar in one respect, East and West German poems dealing with identity issues suggest that differences in values and attitudes have to be accounted for, accepted, and ultimately integrated into a truly unified Germany. The goal remains to create a broader understanding in order to acknowledge the different, but mutually informing histories, and to create a nation that accepts its different heritages as vital components of a new German sense of self. It is in this regard that these lyric voices of ten years ago speak eloquently to us today.

Notes

¹I wish to thank Janet Swaffar and Katherine Arens for their suggestions regarding earlier drafts of this paper and two anonymous *German Quarterly* reviewers for their valuable, detailed critiques.

²Although the terms "unification," "reunification," and "Wende" are often used interchangeably and assumed to be synonymous, each is associated with somewhat different connotations. For discussions of these nuances, see Conrady, "Wendezeit" 206-12; Fürter 335-43.

³In his introductory essay, Weninger emphasizes the parallel between 1945 and 1989. Both periods are marked by "Nullpunkt [...], Kahl-schlag [...], Vergangenheitsbewältigung [...], Schuldfrage" (vii). Erhart draws the same connection in the introduction to his analysis of poetry from Conrady's anthology (141-45). In a recent issue of the *Germanic Review* devoted exclusively to German poetry after the wall, Michael Eskin emphasizes a renewed acknowledgement of poetry's "crucial cultural and political function" and its "fundamental [...] role in the manifold processes of dealing with and conceiving of postwall German history in the making" (3).

⁴For example, of the 25 essays in *German Literature at a Time of Change 1989-1990*, only four are exclusively dedicated to poetry. Williams analyzes Botho Strauß both as poet and prose writer. The essay collections *Wendezeiten -Zeitenwenden* and *Schreiben nach der Wende* contain only one analysis of poetry each.

⁵Fan Hilton analyses Heinz Czechowski's poetry after unification, Wolfgang Ertl compares his poetry to that of Reiner Kunze, who is also studied by Peter Graves; Volker Braun is a frequent subject of investigation (e.g., Marquardt), and so are Sarah Kirsch (e.g., Consentino), Reiner Müller (e.g., Chiarloni, and Durs Grünbein <Erhart; Ryan, "Schädelnähte").

⁶Ryan does not specifically compare East and West German poetry; however, she considers the responses of GDR poetry both after 1945 and 1989 as "way of articulating, but also of eliding or covering up the truth during periods of historical change." ("Deckname Lyrik" 40).

⁷A poetry which defines its identity only in opposition to the restraints which regulate its existence will be left floundering if those re-

straints are removed" ("Gegensprache" 415). She concludes, though, by saying that "[r]ecent publications [...] suggest that neither their language(s) nor the impetus of their poetry will be lost in the transition" (424). Leeder also takes up the topic in her more recent book, *Breaking Boundaries: A New Generation of Poets in the GDR*, where she scrutinizes the work of young East German poets and their attempts to counter the sense of "disintegration of self, history, and language" (235).

Surprisingly, the surveys of German poetry in the standard reference books all but neglect the treatment of identity issues in post-wall poetry. Elm's brief overview of recent poetry in the enlarged edition of *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik* focuses on the generational divide, rather than on East/West differences. Likewise, Schnell's separation of GDR and FRG literature up to the end of his *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1945* does not address the underlying identity conflicts. S13rensen's *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur* does underscore the difficulties of adaptation especially for the GDR writer (2: 429ff.), and discusses the "Literaturstreit" between East and West Germans (2: 430-33), however, he does not refer to a single poet or poem.

9See, for example, Noordhoorn 123; Erhart 148ff.; Ryan 39-42; Hilton, "Überstandene Wende"; Owen, "Ex-GDR Poet." The conclusions Noordhoorn and Erhart draw from their analyses are strikingly dissimilar. While Noordhoorn sees "an under-tone of hope" for "a sense of belonging" and "a better future" (124), Erhart characterizes the poetry itself as lacking orientation, destabilizing, and identity-threatening (165), which merely indicates a potential, future search for the self.

10Both poems appeared in Conrady's anthology *Voneinem Land und vom andern. Gedichte zur deutschen Wende*, cited hereafter as "Conrady, Wende." Rennert's and Krolow's poems are on p. 34 and p. 93, respectively. Originally, Krolow's poem was published in his volume *Ich höre mich sagen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992); Rennert's in *Neue deutsche Literatur* 38, Heft 4 (1990). Although Krolow (b.1915) and Rennert (b. 1943) belong to different generations of postwar poets, I maintain that the kinds of political and existential pressures affecting poets in East and West Germany require us to view at least the initial response to

unification as foregrounding the East-West divide more than the generational (cf. Leeder's analysis of five older and five younger "Ex-GDR Poets," which comes to the conclusion that the sense of loss, dispossession and alienation are experienced by both generations [507]).

11Deictic (Greek for "showing") words point towards, refer to or show something, and include grammatical categories such as pronouns (e.g., "he," "none," "both") or adverbs (e.g., "here," "there"). Repetition can be considered deictic by its very nature of referring back to the same word or phrase. A specific form of repetition particularly important for the analysis of poetry is the repetition of rhyme words, which can be used to highlight a correspondence or contrast. Parallelism indicates analogy by showing something as analogous or equal through recurrent syntactical or grammatical similarities. Thus pointing to words or phrases, it can be considered a form of deixis. Anaphora, in its rhetorical use, combines parallelism with repetition. A special form of parallelism, chiasm indicates an inverted relationship between syntactic elements of parallel phrases.

12Other anthologies I will quote from are *Der neue Conrady: Das große deutsche Gedichtbuch. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Düsseldorf: Artemis und Winkler, 2000), cited as "Conrady, *Gedichtbuch*."

13Both poems have been reprinted in their entirety in the Appendix; citations indicate line numbers as they appear there.

14The train journey, travel, and the "Ortswechsel" in general are central motifs by which East German poets picture their feeling of homelessness and "unhousedness" (Leeder, *Boundaries* 222). See, e.g., Heidenreich's "Janusland" (Chiarloni/Pankoke 34), Drawert's "Unterwegs" (31), Kirsch's "Reisezehrung" (14), and "Aus dem Haiku Gebiet" (Conradi, *Wende* 106) Gröning, "Heimfahrt von Prag" (8) and "Fahrt zum Palast der Republik" (48). These East German poems can be seen as an ironic counterpoint to the use of the same travel metaphor by the pro-unification rhetoric of the West German *FAZ* ("D-Zug [der] deutschen Einheit," *FAZ* 1 April 1990, cited in Peitsch 166).

15The disappearance of the speaker reappears in several other West German *post-Wende* poems, which I will further exemplify with Ulrich Treichel's "Am Brandenburger Tor" (Conra-

dy, *Geschichtsbuch* 1193, and Jochen Kelter's "Deutsche Frage" (Conrady, *Wende* 104-05) in section three.

16In her introduction, Leeder discusses the opposition of possession and loss in several East German poems as variation on Volker Braun's line "Und unverständlich wird mein ganzer Text" in his "Das Eigentum." It is the "invalidated text of a lifetime" (*Boundaries* 2) which poets such as Rennert, Kunert ("Biographie") and Kirchner ("Zwischen den Ufern") deplore.

17 I use the notion of the "speaking subject" in the sense of Julia Kristeva as "subject of enunciation," constituted through "the operating consciousness" and "interlocutory relationships" in discourse (131).

18 However, one might detect a lingering doubt as to this future vision in the final word "keinem" [i.e., Land], which indicates the continuing presence of two countries, rather than a unified one.

19 Some examples are Kunert's "Biographie" (Chiarloni/Pankoke 98), Kirsch's "Reisezehrung" (14-17), Czechowski's "Historische Reminiszenz" (74-75), "Notiz" (103), and "Nach dem Umsturz" (Conradi, *Wende* 132). For critical discussions see Leeder, *Boundaries*; Owen "Ex-GDR" and *Poet's Role* (esp. Ch. 3: "History and Poetry: 'Wende-Zeitgedichte,'" 75-134).

20 Although he does not expand on this topic, Elm confirms that unification affects East German poets existentially, while in West German poetry the more remote history (esp. the Third Reich) dominates (614).

21 The FRG's self-definition through the economic miracle indicates an orientation on the present and future of the State as a way of avoiding the immediate past. As many of Günter Grass' poems, such as "Das Unsre" (Grass, *Novemberland* 138) or "Novemberland" (140) stress and criticize, the rejection of the Nazi past became the basis of the constitution of national identity in the Federal Republic after the war (see also Koonz 262ff. and Koschar).

22 Indeed, as Owen claims, the poets' "understanding of their role [as mediator between state and people] was retained by writers even when they opposed 'den real existierenden Sozialismus'" as they saw themselves to be educating, encouraging, and comforting ("Ex-GDR Poet" 492).

23 Ryan, analyzing poetry after 1945 and 1989, suggests there was a "greater disorientation of

the lyric subject in the post-Wall period" (39) than after 1945 and links this to the frequency of the theme of the double self around 1989.

24 By contrast, a West German poem which uses the train motif, such as Jürgen Becker's "Im Zugfenster ..." (Conrady, *Wende* 1 19), centers on the impersonality and fragmentation of human relationships. While it does echo the theme of the double self in the second person self-references, the poem is primarily concerned with the lack of a sense of coherence and togetherness as he tumbles "von einem Traum in den anderen" (1. 40).

25 Conrady cites as his source Rathenow's volume *Verirrte Sterne oder Wenn alles wieder mal ganz anders kommt* (Gifkendorf, 1994). The anthology *Grenzfallgedichte* has a slightly different version, the source of which is an (undated) manuscript (see Chiarloni/Pankoke 112).

26 The poem was originally published in her *Deutsches Roulette* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991).

27 Cf. Conrady, "Wendezeit" 212-23. Other West German poems thematizing the dehumanizing effect of an economically motivated unification are Grass's "Späte Sonnenblumen" (Conradi, *Wende* 116) and Krolow's "Das Denken in Immobilien" (117). On the treatment of this topic in novels of the time see Peitsch 177-78.

28 See Soldat for an analysis of the feeling of defeat and the presence of 'colonialism' in select novels dealing with unification. The comparison to colonialism is also frequent in the debate around Wolf's "Was bleibt" (see for example Anz 129 and 218-20). "Volk/ohne Raum" (7) refers to the title of an extremely popular colonial novel by Hans Grimm (1875-1959). Published in 1926, his most important work gave the National Socialists a welcome catchphrase, proclaiming the idea that the Germans were lacking sufficient "Lebensraum" (cf. Killy 6652).

29 Owen sees this sense of "history as non-linear and labyrinthine" (*Poet's Role* 131), the general preoccupation with time (132), and the greater concern with the collapse of the GDR rather than with unification itself (126) as characteristic of post-unification GDR poetry.

30 Hilton points out the "conflicts [of a] writer seeking the high moral ground whilst trying to come to terms with conditions affecting art in a DM-consumerist society." ("Überstandene Wen-

de?" 226). Such feelings of dispossession are epitomized by Volker Braun's "Nachruf" (Chiaroni/Pankoke 109; under the title "Das Eigentum" in Conrady, *Wende* 109). Some other East German poems in Conrady's *Wende* anthology which deal with the topic in a similar way are Walther Petri's "unlyrisch" (42), Elke Erb's "Postfeudaler Fürstenwandel" (54), and Bert Papenfuss-Gorek's "soziale marktmonarchie" (69).

31 However, in Treichel's poem the ravens also allude to Germanic mythology and Odin's ravens Hugin, meaning "Denken", and Munin, meaning "Gedächtnis." This indicates on the one hand the need to go back to the roots of German memory, but on the other hand, a conflict between 'thinking' / 'memory' and the individual. Aligning with the crowd, the ravens outcry the speaker and his poem. The connection between memory and the self, which Gillis sees as prerequisite for the notion of identity (Gillis 3), thus becomes problematic. On the other hand, it is precisely this line ("Deutschland einig Vaterland") that Johannes R. Becher incorporated into the national anthem of the GDR (Parkes, "Introduction" 8-9). Its presence in this West German poem may thus point to the desire to incorporate the common past and that of the GDR into the present unified Germany.

32 For a thorough analysis of the ex-GDR poet's changed role see Owen's "The Ex-GDR poet and the people."

33 *Aß* Ulrike Bremer shows, young East and West German prose writers reveal an analogous stance. Here, it is the "Gestaltung der Erzählerfigur" which polarizes writers in the two fields of "Subjektivierung" (246) and retreat into the autobiographical perspective (East) and abstraction of the events (West).

34 I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.

35 For the reflection of such different concepts of identity even in people's speech and communication habits see Conrady, "Wendezeit" 212-20; Müller; Klein.

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Appendix. Rennert's and Krolow's Poems

Jürgen Rennert (East German, b. 1943):
"Mein Land ist mir zerfallen"

Mein Land ist mir zerfallen 1
Sein' Macht ist abgetan.
Ich hebe gegen allen
Verstand zu klagen an.

Mein Land ist mir gewesen, 5
was ich trotz seiner bin;
ein welterfahrnes Wesen,
Mit einem Spalt darin.

Mein Land hat mich verzogen,
Und gehe doch nicht krumm 10
Und hat mich was belogen,
Und bin doch gar nicht dumm.

Mein Land hat mich mit Wider-
Willn an die Brust gepreßt.
Und kam am Ende nieder 15
Mit mir, der es nicht läßt.

Mein Land trägt meine Züge,
Die Züge tragen mich.
Ich bin die große Lüge
Des Landes. <Wfr meint: ich.) 20
(14. Januar 1990)

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Karl Krolow (West German, b. 1915)
"Von einem Land und vom andern"

Man glaubt's nicht, besieht seine
Hände, 1
im Spiegel sein Gesicht:

Deutschland am anderen Ende
und hier-denn man glaubt es nicht-
ÜBER ALLES, hießes. Man fände 5
den Reim heute ohne Gewicht.
Es reimt sich doch alles nicht!

Von einem Land und vom andern
weiß man zu wenig, zu viel.
Mit bloßem Wissen und Wandern 10
verfehlt ein jeder das Ziel.

Und wenn er es schließlich fände:
Deutschland am anderen Ende
hat anderes Gewicht.

Über alles ringt man die Hände 15
bloß. Reimen sollte man nicht:
es sei denn man verschwände
in einem andern Gedicht,

das ruhig von beiden spricht--
vom anderen und dem einen 20
und fürchtete sich vor keinem.
(1992)

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