

INTRODUCTION

“Coming to Terms” with the German Past



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At the end of World War II, the term *inner emigration* gained currency in Germany as a way to describe the plight of writers who were not forced into exile after 1933 when Adolf Hitler came to power, but rather were able to remain in Germany during the Nazi period. The term suggested, after the war, that these writers had in fact ‘emigrated’ in spirit, if not in body, by turning inward, away from the enforced or coerced beliefs of National Socialist ideology that surrounded them, in order to survive oppression and war with their own humane values intact. But could one continue to publish works of fiction or commentary under the Nazis that might amount to aesthetic resistance to fascism? Or could one even remain pointedly neutral? If so, how? Was it at all possible to stay in Germany and avoid collaboration, compromise, and complicity in the ideological apparatus of the Nazi state? If so, how? Even before 1945, and certainly ever since then, the term *inner emigration* has been at the center of debates about the period of National Socialism in Germany, and the term has continually posed questions about what exactly a given writer (or artist or scholar, etc.) did during the twelve-year period from 1933 to 1945, and about how specific actions and specific texts are to be evaluated. This volume raises issues of historical and literary interpretation with respect to a morally complex situation. In the last decade, new research and information have forced a reassessment of individual writers, which in turn has forced a reassessment of the period as a whole, and given new urgency to questions surrounding *inner emigration*.

In the wake of German reunification during the 1990s, developments in research related to literary life and work under the Nazis and its relation to postwar German literature seemed constantly to overtake the ability of scholars to maintain an overview of the period: the ground of discussion in this area was constantly unsettled by volcanic eruptions of new knowledge

and seismic rumblings and aftershocks of reinterpretation and debate, all of which form a new basis for a comprehensive portrayal of the period. In fact, however, an organized understanding of the phenomenon of *inner emigration* has always been confounded by disputes over the term itself, though the issue is ultimately not a matter of nomenclature, but rather of more far-reaching concerns about literary evaluation, moral discernment, and the writing of history. This volume brings together scholars who have participated in either of the *two* most recent of *four* phases in the reception of *inner emigration* that I would like now to summarize briefly.

(1) In the early 1930s, the term *inner emigrant* (or a close variant) began to appear in scattered utterances with a plainly positive meaning, referring sympathetically to someone, either liberal or conservative, who no longer felt at home in Germany but who remained there anyway under adverse and increasingly dire circumstances and who retained strong critical and anti-Nazi convictions, turning inward out of necessity in order to ensure the survival of an opposition in Germany—active in spirit if not in deed. In 1935 the surprise appearance of a man in a mask at the Writers' Congress in Paris—a faceless emissary from Germany representing an underground of German antifascist writers—provides the emblematic scenario for this heroic view of *inner emigration* in brave but anonymous solidarity with the world against Hitler and his thugs and minions. German writers in exile and in *inner emigration* seemed to share a common plight and hope, despite very different circumstances. Yet after that symbolic moment at center stage as the object of international admiration and moral support, the writer of *inner emigration* in Germany was lost to view: the ensuing decade of menace and persecution, isolation and estrangement, terror and coercion, hardship and violence, propaganda and war, made such a posture of spirited defiance increasingly difficult or perhaps even impossible to maintain within Germany, as the pressures grew to conform and to collaborate in the ideological apparatus of the Nazi state. The exact nature of those pressures and how they affected the daily reality and literary production of writers in—but perhaps not of—the Third Reich still requires elucidation.

This volume aims to focus attention on writers and, to a lesser degree, other artists and intellectuals in this period, both individually and collectively. The goal of the volume is twofold: to take another step in broadening the basis of historical specificity in evaluating this literature in this period, and to open up and introduce the complex phenomenon of German literary and cultural history in this century to an English-speaking public through essays that view the phenomenon from different general perspectives, and through individual case studies. Such historical specificity allows for finer discrimination of guilt—not necessarily for exoneration—and greater understanding of the range of complicity, integrity, or ambiguity in its fine gradations in the work and in the person. Thus, the emphasis of the volume is historical and literary, and the link is necessarily

biographical. Unlike older New Criticism or more recent poststructuralist discourse, this volume brings the author's life back into immediate juxtaposition with, and integration into, the literary work to order to locate the points of interpenetration.

(2) After the war, however, German society in general, West and East, was not interested in looking critically into the recent past, but solely, even blindly, toward the future: a monolithic view of the totalitarian dark ages blocked further inquiry into the texture of everyday life in that period, and into the actual activities, literary and otherwise, of writers under the Nazi regime. The heroic *inner emigrant* seemed at first to have vanished from the stage of history—except that, right away in 1945, the novelist Frank Thieß invoked again that heroic image of a defiant underground of *inner emigrants* in an intemperate and accusatory exchange with Thomas Mann, the most famous of all German writers in exile. Thieß asserted the once positive connotations of the term for polemical and self-aggrandizing purposes: he staked out a clear but untenable position, claiming the moral superiority of writers in *inner emigration*, who had experienced the German tragedy on location, rather than as spectators from the balcony seats of exile, as he phrased it. Such provocations were acts of preemptive obscurantism, designed to impose a simplistic and favorable interpretation onto an intellectually, morally, and emotionally complex situation. Thomas Mann was goaded into the following harsh response: “In my eyes, the books that could even get into print in Germany from 1933 to 1945 are less than worthless and not to be touched. A stench of blood and criminality clings to them. They should all be pulped.” Their rude exchange polarized German literature into two camps, that of *inner emigration* and that of exile. Thieß's disingenuous asseverations of a “deep inner bond” between writers in exile and those in *inner emigration* in effect actually severed any such bond. As a result, that term *inner emigration* has been fraught ever since with connotations of spurious and exculpatory self-stylization that raise questions about one's specific actions and meanings (for that reason, we have chosen to highlight the term with italics throughout the volume). Frank Thieß only managed, in fact, to attach to the term a penumbra of suspicion, to polarize writers and to impose upon further discussion a tense, even bitter dichotomy between the writers in exile and those who remained in Germany. Subsequent scholarship has had to wrest the discussion from the grips of that antithesis.

In this volume, Stephen Brockmann's essay examines in detail that crucial moment in German social and literary history of the initial debate about *inner emigration* ignited by Thieß with his provocation of Thomas Mann, which serves as a sort of “primal scene” for all later discussions of the term, and concept as well as for the individual responses. This clash of ideas about *inner emigration* also serves as a prototype (in its vitriolic and vituperative intensity) for future literary debates that actually rehearse much larger issues surrounding Germany's relation in the postwar and

postreunification period to its past and its identity as a nation [*Staat*] or at least, on another level, as a common culture [*Kulturnation*].¹ This debate was the touchstone for discussions of *inner emigration* over the years, and is as well for the other essays in this volume.

(3) In the early 1970s, in the landmark proceedings of two linked conferences at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and at Washington University in St. Louis, published in two volumes with the title *Exile and Inner Emigration*, scholars set to work to move the discussion beyond the gulf that had divided those two camps for almost three decades: essays by, among others, Reinhold Grimm, Jost Hermand, Guy Stern, Frank Trommler, Charles Hoffmann, and David Bathrick, some of whom have now also contributed to this volume, laid the groundwork at the time for further, more detailed consideration of the period. For example, in refuting the popular notion of a *Zero Hour* in German history on 8 May 1945, Frank Trommler highlighted the continuity of German literary traditions, within Germany *and* in exile, from the 1920s through the 1930s and the Third Reich, and into the postwar period. Subsequent studies of the literary journals that provided points of cohesion and identification (such as Marion Mallmann's and Horst Denkler's separate studies of *Das Innere Reich* or Joseph Dolan's study of the *Die Kolonne*) for aesthetically—if not always politically—conservative writers in the late Weimar and early National Socialist period reinforced our understanding of the continuities in Germany from the Weimar years *through the Nazi period* into the postwar period. More recent work on international literary trends, such as Doris Kirchner's examination of "magic realism" in this period, which brings that term back from its later and more famous Latin American variants to its origin in German aesthetic discourse of the Weimar years, has also served to underscore the broad continuities at work in German literature in the mid-twentieth century. Yet the focus ultimately in that broadening scope of analysis has to remain on individual writers and their work in its relation to the reigning ideology of National Socialism. The question of continuities now turns away from historical overviews and toward the specific (in)actions, literary or otherwise, of individuals.

Reinhold Grimm, in his "In the Thicket of Inner Emigration" (1972; 1976), called for "a sliding scale ... from active opposition to passive resistance" in order to allow more finely differentiated historical analysis of individual cases. Charles Hoffmann also directed attention, even more broadly, to the range of subtle gradations between the opposite poles of antifascist and propagandistic literature. These essays provided at the time the necessary framework for historical contextualization, though without having then discovered new sources and materials, as the editors (Grimm and Hermand) also noted. Scholars such as Karl Heinz Schoeps and Hans Dieter Schäfer began the process of close critical examination of the nexus between life and work in the case of individual writers in this period. In line with contemporaneous developments in *Alltagsgeschichte*

(the “school” of historiography in Germany devoted to exploring for their collective significance the unassuming manifestations of daily life), Schäfer’s essay and his notion of a nonfascist literature, as distinct from an actively antifascist literature, provided a necessary tool for this scholarly labor by breaking away from prevailing notions of a unified historical experience under totalitarianism (and the strict dichotomy of fascist or antifascist literature) in order to investigate more closely the actual relations, risks, options, and actions available to individuals and publications at that time. His ground-breaking essay, packed with historical detail on the niches of “high” modernist and popular culture (here abridged for an English-speaking audience without access to all of his sources), demonstrated how a “split consciousness” permeated this generation of artists and intellectuals under Nazism. If these essays taken together (by Trommler, Grimm, and Schäfer, among others) were foundational for subsequent analysis of the period, Schäfer’s continuous work in particular on this period constitutes the ground floor of that edifice.

Hans Dieter Schäfer’s first essay gave fresh impetus to the examination of this period in literary history, and his investigations of this period have figured as a line of continuity for subsequent scholarship; he is, therefore, represented in this volume by two essays. In his second essay, he provocatively calls into question some of the presuppositions of his first essay, and considers Germany during the Third Reich from the perspective of modernity at large and how the Nazi culture of spectacle anticipates developments in postwar Germany and of postmodernity. With Schäfer, under the rubric of “New Perspectives: Synoptic Studies,” this volume presents new, revisionary approaches to the literature of *inner emigration* as a collective phenomenon. Like Schäfer, Frank Trommler’s work in the field was foundational and has also figured prominently in the latter two phases of the reception of *inner emigration*. His new essay, drawing upon theories of reader reception, approaches the phenomenon from the socio-historical perspective of Nazi policies on reading and book production, and illuminates the participation by *inner emigrants* in a sort of semipublic sphere of literary activity, where they hovered (or tried to hover) between independent creation and ideological cooptation. Volker Dahm’s essay goes a step further in that same direction to examine the precise contours of the niche for writers in the Third Reich, the bureaucratic interstice between jurisdictions and official policies that a writer, if bold enough, could try to exploit, though at considerable risk. The nexus between literature and ideology, or poetry and politics, emerges also in the essays by Leonard Olschner and Colin Riordan that demonstrate, in turn, how poets responded or reacted to their political environment by adopting a notion of time that transported them out of the historical context, a metaphysics of flight, as it were, or contrarily, by attempting in prose fiction to confront the situation in some manner by developing, or at least speculating upon, a political theory, a theory of state, set in another age but standing in (critical) relation to the historical present of National Socialism.

(4) Since those earlier foundational essays, the task of later literary-historical research has been to work within that framework by discovering and interpreting the details of writers' lives and their literature, with all due wariness of their own self-stylizations. In the recent debate about Günter Eich, Schäfer referred to this act of painstaking historical research and often contentious literary-critical inquiry as an "archaeology of the truth" (Karst, 87). The figure of the scholar resembles less an archeologist at times than a detective, and it is probably not entirely a coincidence that these decades of scholarly research into daily life under the Nazis (literary and otherwise) have given rise in Philip Kerr's trilogy *Berlin Noir* (1993) to precisely the sort of morally ambiguous detective figure (Bernie Gunther) that characterizes the hard-boiled genre in general to be sure but also seems very much at home embedded in the circumstances of the Third Reich, where he operates on his own, trying to negotiate a space of relative independence between the Party and his conscience. Such a figure captures both the predicament of inner emigrants and the challenge to later scholars to sort through the literary and historical evidence in order to try to achieve clarity of interpretation and evaluation.

Under the rubric of "New Perspectives: Case Studies," this volume presents essays on leading literary figures of the period with an eye toward the particularity of their situation, focusing on the ambiguities in their works and in their accounts of their lives, or on the simple discrepancies, or flat contradictions. Here, aside from the inevitability of some degree of self-stylization in each case, generalization has to give way to the specificity of detail and the implications of individual action in life, or specific wording in literature: what emerges is a mosaic of circumstances and individuals trying "to come to terms" first with their present in the Third Reich, and then ever after with the German collective past, and indeed with their own private pasts. From the despairing arch-conservative Reck-Malleczewen (in the essay by Karl-Heinz Schoeps) to the well-known and popular Erich Kästner (in the essay by Guy Stern), these essays show a range of uncomfortable attitudes or postures with regard to the regime. That range could of course be extended to include many other figures, who cannot all be included here.² Of greatest interest perhaps is how each essay illuminates the individual as an agent in public and private history. Each case is in fact a window on the making of collective history by individuals and provides a stark sense of how what we do stays with us and adds up to the historical record of our world, then and now.

But even if we approach our subjects as an archeologist, rather than as a detective (or most likely a combination of the two), it deserves emphasis that the excavation, the sleuthing, the research we perform, does not burrow into a distant past, but rather uncovers the foundation of German society and literature in the present. The award of the Nobel Prize to Günter Grass, and the fifty-year anniversary of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1999, remind us of the "presentness" of the past (that is, the Nazi past) in Germany. In fact, in the last decade, this task, far from becoming

an antiquarian pastime, has gained new impetus and even public urgency: scholarly inquiry into the history and literature of the Nazi years and the immediate postwar period has been successively galvanized in turn by access to new archival materials after Reunification; by the anniversaries of the war and postwar events that invited reconsideration of the period; by the passing away of the generations that lived through that period; by the parallel questions about the relations between writer and State in the former German Democratic Republic; and, in the realm of ahistorical literary theory, by the revelations, for example, of Paul de Man's real historical collaborationist activities (see Lehmann); or, for further example in the arts, by the recurring discussion of Leni Riefenstahl, or in the field of German Studies by the surprising case of Hans Schwerte, a.k.a. Hans Ernst Schneider, who until 1996 pursued a prominent postwar career as a scholar and university administrator under a pseudonym, hiding his past service in the Nazi SS (see König, Kuhlmann, and Schwabe); or by the case of Elisabeth Noelle-Neuman, the best known German opinion pollster, whose early training was in the service of Nazi propaganda (see Pöttker); or in the natural sciences, by ongoing debates about Werner Heisenberg's role in the (non-?) development of a German atomic bomb (as brought out of the realm of scholarship and into broad public consciousness by Michael Freyn's play *Copenhagen*, about Heisenberg's inscrutable visit to Niels Bohr in Denmark).³ The list could go on and extend even farther outside of literature into all realms of German society and intellectual or artistic disciplines. In this volume, the essay by Amy Sims demonstrates the responses of historians, as the historical conscience of the nation or culture, and how they failed to act and hid in their studies of the past. The essay by David Bathrick turns to the artistic genre perhaps most reliant on state funding and policy to show how some films, despite the pressure for political propaganda in such a mass medium, could develop cinematic codes of ambiguity and modes of (highly abstract and modest) resistance. Yet however far one pursues the notion of *inner emigration* through German society in the 1930s and 1940s, the topic would return to the context of German literature, where that debate has figured most prominently and most representatively. Literature provides here the locus of best advantage for an inquiry into the phenomenon of artistic and intellectual *inner emigration*, which only underscores the historical embeddedness of literature.

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The terms of the debate in literary circles and literary scholarship extend even beyond literature and intellectual or artistic disciplines. Whereas Ralf Schnell aptly suggests that writers in the Third Reich had a *Schattendasein* (a shadow existence), caught between conscience and compromise, they in fact shared that dilemma, though perhaps more acutely felt, pondered, and formulated, with all citizens. The historian Detlev Peukert defined it as: "the multiple everyday ambiguities of 'ordinary people'

making their choices among the varying greys of active consent, accommodation and nonconformity" (243). In fact, the surprise publication in 1995 of Victor Klemperer's diaries of the period from 1933 to 1945 illuminated most starkly the lives of ordinary people in those years in Dresden and provided an uncommonly vivid, precise, poignant, and microscopic view of daily life under the Nazis from the vantage point of a German Jewish intellectual (Jewish by descent, Protestant by confession) in forced residence in a so-called Jews' House and in forced labor, who with his wife managed against the odds to survive the long nightmare of Nazi persecution leading to the Holocaust and the Dresden firebombing.

Those diaries became bestsellers in postreunification Germany and showed the need to understand—for the sake of "coming to terms" with Germany's past and Germany's future—the paradoxes and ambiguities of daily life in Germany during the Third Reich. As a German Jew who refused to emigrate abroad and leave Germany, Klemperer was forced into the position of *inner emigration* that others chose, though an *inner emigration* of much greater severity than anything endured by "Aryan" inner emigrants. In short, Klemperer's diaries provide an immediate insider's view of *inner emigration* from the perspective of a victim of active persecution, rather than of ideological intimidation (one might compare, for example, the real anguish in the diaries of Oskar Loerke as he continued to work as an editor). Diaries such as Klemperer's in particular (or Loerke's or numerous others) show the long, slow, corrosive, self-protective process of turning inward as either critical or capitulatory encapsulation, or both.

The scholar-critic has to follow that turn inward, trace its trajectory and its contexts, focus in on all the ordinary, the all-too-ordinary, ambiguities in this period, and examine all the more intently the shades of meaning in each work (whether literary, or artistic, or scientific, etc.) in order to isolate and elucidate its historical agency, and bring the author's life and literature out of history's shadows—some for the better and some for the worse.

Notes

1. Stephen Brockmann's book on *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) explores the issues in the full context of postwar German culture.
2. See, for example, my study of Karl Krolow, who never counted himself among representatives of an *inner emigration*, but whose biography and literary work reveal common traits with others of his generation in this regard.
3. See David C. Cassidy's biography of Heisenberg, a model of the scholarly integration of life and work that this area of inquiry requires (along with his subsequent essays on German science during the Third Reich, and his review of Thomas Powers's book, which summarizes the debate about Heisenberg). See also Beyerchen's invaluable study.

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