
The Reclaiming of Saxony and its Dialect in Post-Wall East German Literature

GABRIELE ECKART
SOUTHEAST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

Darf unsereins nicht gerade im Okay-Zeitalter wenigstens
andeutungsweise die Sprache der Verlierer sprechen?

[May we in the okay-age not at least speak
the language of the losers by way of a hint?]
(Rosenlöcher 13)

The dispersion of identity in East Germany as a result of German reunification and globalization has brought about the need to find one's regional identity. While this is true for people of all East German regions, it is articulated most conspicuously in texts of writers from Saxony. Two generations of writers from the former GDR have reclaimed their Saxon identity by exploring local life in its entirety, which includes the Saxon dialect, and by attempting to acquire a specific Saxon perspective in looking at the world and, specifically, at German history.

André Kubiczek in his novel *Junge Talente* (2002) tells about a young man who during the last years of the GDR moves from a provincial town to East Berlin. While crossing a street, he stumbles and is almost hit by a car. Insulted by aggressive remarks of passers-by about his clumsiness, he forces himself not to respond because this would give him away as a stranger. "Sie hätten ihn für einen Sachsen gehalten, ... so wie sie alles für sächsisch hielten, was sie nicht kannten oder nicht mochten oder vom Kapitalismus über sie gebracht worden war oder von der Partei" ["They would have taken him for a Saxon, ... as they considered everything Saxon that they didn't know or didn't like or what was imposed on them by capitalism or by the party"] (67). Although the SED tried to suppress such antagonisms due to its conviction that "this kind of regional identity was a typical product of the bourgeois class enemy" (Szejnmann 143), Saxons had retaliated to Prussian prejudice with satiric proverbs and songs, such as:

Und den Balasd dor Reublig
ham Sachsen hochgezohng.
Denn was so ihr Berliner baud,
is bugglich und verbohng.

[And the Palace of the Republic
Was built by Saxons,
Because, what you Berliners build,
Is crooked and bent.]
(heard in Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk on March 3, 1990)

However, after German Reunification in 1990, Saxons had to realize that not only Prussians, but most Germans, looked down on them for their dialect and for conclusions that were drawn from it about a supposed Saxon character. This seems puzzling, because, as Gerhard Zimmermann stated, from the 16th to the 18th centuries, the Saxon dialect was considered the “feinste Deutsch” [“finest German”] (99)—partially because Saxony was one of the heartlands of Reformation. Young Germans from other regions went on “Bildungsreisen” [“educational trips”] (101) to Saxony in order to improve their skills in speaking German.

The change, according to Zimmermann, occurred after the Seven-Year War (1756-1763) that Saxony lost. The consequent shift of power to Prussia was accompanied by the “Ende des sächsischen Regimentes der Sprachherrschaft über die deutschen Idiome” [“the end of the Saxon rule over the German idioms”] (104). As a result, the singing intonation and the weak pronunciation of the consonants *p*, *t*, *k*—the most conspicuous characteristics of the Saxon dialect—were looked upon with contempt.

There are two generations of writers from the former GDR who celebrate Saxony in their literary works. The first are mainly members of the so-called “Sächsische Dichterschule” [“Saxon School of Poets”]—“ein Verbund von Poeten, die nach Generation und landschaftlichem Bezug, nach dichterischer Haltung und gesellschaftlichem Bedürfnis zusammenhängen” [“a group of poets who were united by generation, regional reference, poetic attitude, and societal need”] (Dieckmann 690).¹ The most important poets of this group are Karl Mickel, Rainer Kirsch, and Heinz Chechowski, all of whom, with the exception of Mickel who died in 2001, are now approximately 70 years old. Even before the fall of the Wall, these poets made it clear that their roots were in Saxony. Mickel, for instance, wrote in “Dritte Ode” [“Third Ode”]: “Ich hänge an Dresden / Das ist meine Heimat” [“I cling to Dresden / That’s my hometown”] (*Schriften* 51). And he frequently included examples of the Saxon dialect in his poems as in “Vox Dei 1945”:

Wenn se uns de Stadt, dr Tommy und Ami
 Zerkloppt ni hätt'n, hätte der, dr Iwan
 Uns hingeschlachtet, wie mer sin, beim Einmarsch
 Das hätte der ni ausgehalten also
 Uns in heilen Städten is ni meechlich.

[If the British and the Americans hadn't
 Destroyed our city, the Russians marching in
 Would have butchered us as we are
 They couldn't have stood it seeing us [live]
 In undamaged cities; that's not possible.] (*Schriften* 44)

An important novelist of this generation who neither before nor after German reunification left any doubt about the importance of his Saxon roots is Erich Loest. Besides exploring the local color of the city of Leipzig in *Alles geht seinen Gang* (1978), the author wrote a biography of Saxon's most popular writer Karl May titled *Swallow, mein wackerer Mustang* (1980). Here, Loest tried to paint in as much detail as possible an authentic picture of Saxon life during the 19th century. It includes typical poor people's dishes in the area around Hohenstein-Ernstthal like "Hämmele" (394)² and many references to the Saxon dialect like the word "Gusche" ["mouth"] (42), as well as to Saxon folk heroes like Stülpner's Karl (101).³ After 1989, Loest in his novel *Nikolaikirche* (1995) made it clear that it was the Saxon City of Leipzig where demonstrations led to the fall of the Wall and to German reunification.

The second generation consists of writers (now between 40 and 50) including Thomas Rosenlöcher, Mathias Biskupek, Michael Wüstefeld, and Kerstin Hensel, who have discovered the importance of their Saxon roots only after German reunification. While the first group clings to their Saxon heritage now mainly for reasons of emotional self-assurance, the second group combines their regional identification with a political cause.

Before analyzing some of the younger Saxon writers' texts, more should be said about Kirsch's, Mickel's, and Chechowski's more recent expressions of Saxon "Heimatbewusstsein." In Mickel's case they can be found in *Lachmunds Freunde* [*Lachmund's Friends*] (1991). They reach from joyful plays with the Saxon dialect while depicting the reaction of some citizens of Dresden to the workers' rebellion on June 17, 1953 to thoughts about how German history would have been different if the Saxon dynasty of the Wettins had been successful:

1842 hatte das Kurfürstentum Sachsen alle Chancen gehabt, als großer Flächenstaat sein Gewicht in die Waagschale mitteleuropäischer, ja europäischer Politik zu werfen. Das unselige Brandenburg-Preußen wäre nicht hochgekommen; die starke Vormacht Sachsens hätte der folgenreichen Barbarei ... von Anfang an Grenzen gesetzt.

[In 1842, the electorate of Saxony had had its chance to throw itself with its large spaces into the pan of balance of Middle German, indeed even European politics. The accursed Brandenburg-Prussia would not have come to power; Saxony's strength would have put an end to the momentous barbarism ... from the very beginning.] (332-333)

In other words, according to Karl Mickel, if Saxony rather than Prussia had dominated German history during the last two hundred years, World War I, World War II, as well as the Holocaust might not have happened. The author is right. However, without Prussia's power and dominance over the different German principalities, they might not have been united in 1871. Germany probably would not exist as one nation.

Rainer Kirsch in *Anna Katarina oder die Nacht am Moorbuch* (1991) tells the story of a beautiful Saxon woman in the form of a ballad; the storyline is supposedly historically accurate. However, in a short epilogue to the book, Kirsch admits in an interview with a fictional scholar of German studies that there are no sources: "Sie sind natürlich unterdrückt worden" ["Of course, they have been suppressed"] (69). That means the story of the young woman who uses her beauty and her power of seduction to undermine the feudal patriarchal structure of the medieval society is fictional. In the end, the nobility hires an assassin to murder her; the woman tragically dies. Kirsch in this ballad indulges in listing Saxon towns and rivers—due to their function in the schemata of rhyme and rhythm many of them are attractively highlighted. In addition, the author believes that there is a certain beauty in Saxon women—a mixture of attractiveness and courage—that doesn't exist anywhere else!

While Kirsch does not speak of his own emotional need to rediscover his Saxon heritage, Heinz Chechowski does. His poems written after 1990 bitterly lament the poetic ego's loss of self-confidence after German reunification. In 1992, a similar loss had caused Manfred Streubel—a well-known poet from Dresden—to commit suicide.⁴ For the first time in his career, Chechowski seems to mistrust his linguistic abilities: "Ach, wenn man das zu beschreiben wüsste" ["Ah, if only one knew how to describe it"] (*Wüste* 55). In some poems he succeeds in pointing out concrete details that trouble him: for example, "Die stummen Trinker, arbeitslos, / Am Straßenrand" ["The silent alcoholics, unemployed, at the road side"] (*Wüste* 24). In other poems he tries to find out who is guilty for his feelings of distress and blames globalization: "Schrecklich, Europa / Macht alles gleich: die Möbel, das Essen, das Trinken" ["Terrible, Europe makes everything the same: furniture, eating, drinking"] (*Wüste* 55). However, in this situation of inner hopelessness, there

is one thing the poet clings to as a transcendental support that seems to prevent him from Streubel's fate:

Immerhin:
Sachsen
Ist wieder
Sachsen.

[After all,
Saxony
Is Saxony
Again.]
(*Wüste* 105)

While the tone of Chechowski's poems written after German reunification is deeply melancholic, Mathias Biskupek's tone in his novel *Der Quotensachse: Vom unaufhaltsamen Aufstieg eines Staatsbürgers sächsischer Nationalität* is hilariously humorous: "das Buch ist der beste Beweis für sächsischen Humor und Hintersinn, der den Sachsen ja bekanntlich spätestens seit Walter Ulbricht abgesprochen wurde" ["the book is the best proof of Saxon humor and a sense of ambiguity that were denied Saxons since Walter Ulbricht"] (Meinel 205). As Kirsch does, Chechowski and Biskupek enjoy playing with the enumeration of Saxon towns and rivers. While the first two authors obviously chose names of towns and rivers that have a sentimental value for them, Biskupek prefers names that according to his taste have a pleasing sound. These are especially words with sibilants like "Ainitzsch an der Zschopau" where people have names like Zwintzsch, Lommatzsch, Nitzsche, and Gruschwitz. According to the narrator, not only the looks of the Saxons—"nicht nordisch oder westlich blond" ["not nordic or western blond"] (emphasis added)—but also the abundance of names with sibilants are proof of the relatedness of Saxons to their Eastern neighbors: Saxon "stand wohl auf einer Stufe mit dem Ostischen, dem slawisch verunreinigten Deutschen" ["stood on a level with the Eastern, the German that was contaminated by Slavs"] (18).

In 1989, the protagonist of Biskupek's novel, Mario Claudius Zwintzsch— a name that highlights the narrator's admiration for the Saxon poet Mathias Claudius—starts working in the so-called *Heimatbüro* of his Saxon hometown. The purpose of this office is to think about "was das Beste für Sachsen sein könnte" ["what might be the best for Saxony"] (133). After German reunification, he becomes very active in the "Ausschuss zur Bekämpfung unsolidarischen Verhaltens" ["Commission for the Fight of Un-unified Behavior"]—that is formed by the *Heimatbüro*. Its goal is to eliminate the opposition between old and young, rich and poor, people from the East and the West. However, its highest principle is "Das sächsische Herz darf niemals

wieder im preußischen Takt schlagen—*es muss blohs eegah bubborn*” [“The Saxon heart may never again beat at the Prussian tempo—it must merely beat on”] (122). In other words, after the fall of the Wall, Zwintzschler dedicates his professional life to the struggle for Saxony “Freistaat zu sein” [“to be a free state”] (141). According to his point of view, the first German unification in 1871 was nothing other than Saxony’s “Anschluss an Preußen” (57)—a joining that was confirmed and continued by the state of the GDR. And now, after the second German unification, called re-unification, in 1990, the danger for Saxony comes from the West, given the fact that for West Germans Saxony apparently was nothing more than “ein Edelstein, den es zu schleifen gelte” [“a gem that had to be cut”] (167). Therefore, the novel abounds in satirical attacks against West Germans who are trying to meddle in Saxon affairs. One attack happens, for instance, during Zwintzschler’s participation in a conference about the Saxon dialect, during which West Germans try to explain to the Saxon participants that their word “quoddern” [“to chat”] according to the dictionary of the Saxon dialect has to be pronounced as “quattern” (158-159). Ironically, the narrator lets this conference end with the West Germans’ demand

unverzüglich Aufbauhelfer aus Schwaben und dem Rheinland, aus dem Allgäu und von der Waterkant nach Sachsen zu entsenden, um das ursprünglich mitteldeutsche Wortgut und die traditionelle Lautierung dort wieder heimisch zu machen.

[to send consultants immediately from Swabia and the Rhine, as well as from the Allgäu and from the Water’s Edge to Saxony to return the original middle German vocabulary and traditional pronunciation.] (160)

After this humiliating experience, Zwintzschler reflects about the differences between words like “quoddern” and the West Germans’ “quattern.” He concludes that apparently they are unable to understand the philosophy that is involved in the Saxon dialect:

Vielleicht ahnen Sie, dass in gewissen weichen Verschleifungen der Mitlaute, in Häufungen von verschiedensten herrlich schlüpfenden Zischlauten, im *Rausloofnassn dor Schbrache* für die Menschen im allgemeinen und die Sachsen im Besonderen ein Element der Wollust liegen kann. *De Weeschn besiechsn de Hardn* ist sächsische Philosophie.

[Maybe you can guess that in certain weak slurrings of the consonants, in the accumulations of different wonderfully slurping sibilants, in letting the language flow out, there can be—for human beings in general, and especially for Saxons, an element of enjoyment. That the soft defeats the hard is Saxon philosophy.] (155)

As Zimmermann shows, since the 19th century, Germans had contemptuously inferred a certain sluggishness, inertia, and opportunism from the Saxon colloquialism. Zwintzschler confirms this conclusion. However, remembering his life in the GDR,

he interprets the Saxon way positively: “Wie sonst hätte die sächsische Nation aus der Asche einer von Berlin gesteuerten Republik wieder auferstehen können, wenn nicht immer wieder Menschen Ruhe bewahrt hätten? *Immor midd dor Ruhe färd dor Bassdor in de Schuhe*” [“How else could the Saxon nation have risen from the ashes of a republic that had been ruled from Berlin, if people had not repeatedly kept calm? *The pastor always puts his shoes on calmly*”] (95) Zwintzschler had succeeded in evading military service, even though his brother Diddi had given in: “Er war ein Klügerer, und ging drei Jahre in die militärischen Dienste der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Er hatte zwar einen dicken Kopf, aber er sah Notwendigkeiten ein. Eine wichtige Eigenschaft des Sachsen” [“He was one of the smarter ones and he joined the military service of the German Democratic Republic for three years. Although he was stubborn, he recognized what was necessary. An important characteristic of Saxons”] (48). However, once a soldier, Diddi was it the Saxon way: subversively turning the Prussian *Zack, zack* into the Saxon *Zaagg, zaagg* (124). In other words, Biskupek’s protagonist justifies the Saxons’ opportunistic attitude by stressing its ambivalence. Besides being a strategy of survival in somber times it is a means of undermining the ruling power. However, this argument does not stand up to close examination. This “typical” Saxon attitude—the narrator paraphrases it using the oxymoron “sich aufrecht bücken” [“bending down while standing upright”] (195)—is not fitting to describe the most widely known and hated Saxon: Walter Ulbricht. Although Biskupek’s narrator defines a Saxon as a person who is born in Saxony and speaks Saxon, even if he is living somewhere else in the world, he calls Ulbricht, who was from the most typical Saxon city of Leipzig (Hundt 245) and clearly spoke its dialect, a “Möchtegernsachse[]” [“Wanna-be-Saxon”] (198-199). The narrator coined this expression without doubt because of Ulbricht’s political role that in its “bücken” [“bending down”] had nothing of “aufrecht” [“standing upright”]. As the chairman of the SED, he had ordered the construction of the Wall in 1961.

In his study of the attitude of the people of the Ruhr region towards themselves, Rolf Lindner concludes that notions of cultural singularity and regional identity are associated less with essence and roots than with a regional ethos as it is “expressed in the likes and dislikes of its members, in their sense of being in favor of (or against) something” (190). That Biskupek’s narrator denies the Saxon Walter Ulbricht the right to call himself a Saxon shows that Lindner’s conclusion is right. Instead of having Saxon “roots” as Ulbricht undeniably does, being Saxon is associated with the Saxon ethos of “sich aufrecht bücken” [“bending down while standing upright”] (195).

Jill Twark pointed out that Biskupek in *Der Quotensachse* is “poking fun at the Saxon regional pride which welled up in the wake of reunification” (1), and she calls the novel a satire. However, she restricts the meaning of the word immediately,

saying that it is a satire “of a more conciliatory nature” (4). To put it precisely, the narrator of Biskupek’s novel tries to distance himself in a satiric tone from his patriotic protagonist, but this distance constantly collapses. In the end, the reader is left with a passionate declaration of love for the Saxon people.

Like Biskupek, the Dresden poet Thomas Rosenlöcher is known for his humor. However, as Wolfgang Ertl pointed out, the term “anrührende[] Drolligkeit” [“touching quaintness”] (36) that critics coined to characterize Rosenlöcher’s texts underestimates

die Aussagekraft der grotesken Elemente in Rosenlöcher’s Werk, durch die auf der Oberfläche zwar der Eindruck des unterhaltsam Harmlosen entsteht, die aber das Gesamtbild einer erschreckenden sich auflösenden Welt sichtbar machen, die sich der utopistischen Illusion einer Sinnggebung entzieht.

[the strength of the grotesque elements in Rosenlöcher’s work that superficially causes the impression of that which is entertaining and harmless, that nevertheless clearly presents the general view of a horrible world, that is dissolving, which refuses to make sense as an utopian illusion.] (36)

Ertl’s observation refers to Rosenlöcher’s text *Die Wiederentdeckung des Gehens beim Wandern. Harzreise* (1991). However, it is equally true for his 1997 essay “Sächsisch als Verlierersprache” [“Saxon as the language of the losers”]. This text that just seems to be hilariously funny turns out to be deeply troubled and at times aggressive. As Biskupek does, Rosenlöcher explores the relationship between the Saxon way to speak—“Maulfaulheit” [“taciturnity”] (11)—and character—“Unterwürfigkeit” [“submissiveness”] (11). Besides the fact that the way Saxons speak strongly influences the way they live, he sees the reverse influence triggered by negative stereotyping: “Mußten die Sachsen nicht längst so sprechen, weil sie längst Die Sachsen waren und einer immer den August machen muß?” [“Did the Saxons not have to speak as they did, because for a long time they were the Saxons and someone always has to be the fool?”] (12). His fiercest attack is directed against the Austrian writer Franz Grillparzer who contemptuously called the Saxon dialect a “Mäh, Mäh von Schafen” [“bleating of sheep”] (qtd. in Rosenlöcher 13) as well as against the West Germans, reminding them that “‘Wir sind das Volk’ war vor allem auf sächsisch gerufen worden” [“‘We are the people’ was shouted mainly in Saxon dialect”] (14). As Erich Loest stressed already, the biggest demonstrations in 1989 were those in Leipzig. Mainly Saxons had triggered the developments that had caused the fall of the Berlin wall and finally German reunification. Given this fact, according to Rosenlöcher, it is unjust that Saxons again started to lose “der eine das Haus, in dem er wohnt, der andere seinen Arbeitsplatz, der dritte seinen Mut” [“The first one the house in which he lives, the second one his job, the third one his courage”] (14). Finding

one's regional identity, as has been seen in the case of Heinz Chechowski, can help the individual to cope with such adverse circumstances. However, this is not always the case. Rosenlöcher shows that over the centuries, many Saxons internalized the contempt for their dialect:

Wo gibt es das sonst im vielsprachigen Deutschland? Selbst wenn Schwäbisch, Bayrisch oder Platt als Zeichen für die Beschränktheit des jeweiligen Sprechers genommen wird, gilt es doch wenigstens dem jeweiligen Sprecher als Ausdruck seines Stolzes und seines Beharrungsvermögens. Allein die Sachsen schämen sich vor sich selber, wenn sie den Mund aufmachen.

[Where else does this exist in the multi-lingual Germany? Even if you take Swabian, Bavarian, or Platt as a sign of the narrow-mindedness of the speaker, at least for the speaker himself it is an expression of his pride and stubbornness. Only the Saxons are ashamed of themselves when they open their mouth.] (11)

Like Biskupek, Rosenlöcher encourages Saxons to show local pride by reinterpreting details of German history. While Biskupek did so with ironic jabs against Prussia, Rosenlöcher directs his satirical blows against Swabians and Bavarians:

Wer aber hatte am Ende das Bußgeld für den Zweiten Weltkrieg zu zahlen? Wer saß, nach dem Bau der Mauer, Kopf an Kopf mit den Preußen, hinter der Mauer, während die Schwaben und Bayern wie selbstverständlich davor saßen und bald schon dreinschauten, als hätten sie das auch verdient?

[Who in the end had to pay the reparations for World War II? Who after the construction of the Wall was sitting, side by side with the Prussians, behind the Wall, while the Swabians and Bavarians took it as a matter of course to sit in front of it and soon looked as if they deserved it?] (13)

These examples should suffice to show that the term “anrührende Drolligkeit” [“touching quaintness”] (Ertl 36) that critics coined to characterize Rosenlöcher's texts is indeed incorrect. It would label this author's work as a postmodern kind of *Biedermeier*. Although Rosenlöcher in parts of his text humorously tries to catalogue the life and customs of his region as *Biedermeier* did, this activity is by no means an end in itself or aimed at the defense of parochial values. Instead, as Ertl pointed out, the author's underlying agenda is to protest vehemently against a world that doesn't make sense.

Other younger writers who have put effort in exploring their Saxon roots are Kerstin Hensel and Michael Wüstefeld. Hensel in an emotive language tries to define the specific way in which Saxon writers have looked at the world. The Saxon look, Hensel writes, is an odd look, a look “von barockem Tenor, der auf die Knochen geht” [“of baroque tone that gets under one's skin”] (121). And precisely this look, she adds, “ist eine Rettung gegen das Absacken ins allgemeine Geschwafel” [“is an

escape from being lost in the general gossip” (121). Wüstefeld calls himself “der Prophet des Dresdner Tales” [“the prophet of the Dresden valley”] (*Nackt hinter* 34). A listing of some of the titles of poems by Wüstefeld indicates his poetic ego’s eagerness to find his regional identity: “Löwenkopf an Pillnitzer Elbschloßmauer” (*Stadtplan* 8), “Zu Graupa bei Wagner” (*Stadtplan* 44), “Wie ich aus Amsterdam nach Dresden zurückgeholt wurde” (*Deutsche* 42), “Meißen” (*Deutsche* 69), “Begegnung in Sachsen zwischen Dresden und Berlin” (*Deutsche* 72), “Talsperre Pöhl” (*Deutsche* 102), and many other titles that name specific locations in Saxony.

Chris Szejnmann, in his critical assessment of the validity of “positive” stereotypes that have been used to describe Saxons, shows that they are myths based on narratives. Exploring them, the author deconstructs these stereotypes, pointing out, for instance, that the “peaceful character” of the Saxons opposed to the more militaristic one of the Prussians is nothing but resignation after a history of lost wars. Or the so-called courage of the citizens of Leipzig that played a special role in fomenting civil opposition that led to German unification was for a good part only their reaction “to resentments that had built up before October 1989 due to the high degree of pollution, the particularly bad condition of the old housing stock, and a miserable supply situation” (151). The author is right in blaming contemporary politicians like Kurt Biedenkopf (Saxony’s first post-unification Prime Minister) for having deployed these stereotypes in asserting their own legitimacy. However, Szejnmann’s contemptuous rejection of the Saxons’ local pride and his praise of the PDS that rejects it are not just. As he himself shows, the “extraordinary strong revival of Saxon identity ... was enhanced because unification triggered a crisis of identity” (149). Globalization arrived together with German unification, causing a sudden and radical change of all values. Jana Simon writes that the former citizens of the GDR

erleben, dass nichts mehr sicher ist—kein System, keine Arbeit, keine Freundschaft, keine Liebe. Das ist etwas, das Angst machen kann, die Angst, austauschbar zu sein und verlassen zu werden. Jeder lebt für sich, nichts mehr ist da, was verbindet. Es ist die Welt der Globalisierung, in der alles mit allem zusammenzuhängen scheint—nur weiss keiner mehr wie—und in der niemand mehr für etwas verantwortlich ist. Es ist die Freiheit, die sie verstört und die alles vage und vorübergehend erscheinen lässt. “Alle ziehen um, kaum einer bleibt mehr an einem Fleck. Alle Werte sind flexibel.”

[experience that nothing is safe anymore—no system, no job, no friendship, no love. That is something that can cause anxiety, the fear to be replacable, to be abandoned. Everybody lives for himself, there is nothing uniting anymore. It is the world of globalization where everything seems to be connected with everything—but nobody knows any more how—and in which nobody is responsible

for anything any more. It is the freedom that is disconcerting to them, and which makes everything appear vague and transitory. “Everybody is on the move, and hardly anybody stays put anymore. All values are flexible.”] (111)

While the main protagonist in Simon’s text ends up committing suicide in a jail cell after he tries to confront this situation by joining a group of old friends who have become criminals, in the texts of the Saxon writers of this study the main characters seek refuge in their regional pride. Although this pride is rooted in stereotypes that can easily be deconstructed—a certain amount of irony that Biskupek uses to subvert them shows that at least this author is aware of it—their choice is legitimate. As “a way of associating oneself with the atemporal” (Gilman 400), local pride serves as a shield against time, in the case of this study against the time of a radical change of all values since 1990 and the dispersion of identity that accompanies it. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak pointed out that “what we are witnessing in the postcolonial and globalizing world is a return of the demographic . . . frontiers that predate and are larger than capitalism” (15). This return is accompanied by a shift in people’s attitude toward language that can be plotted as a “structure of feeling.” She concludes, “We must . . . experience the ‘structure of feeling’ as a narrative of the impossible” (81). Creating literary archives of regional features, celebrating a dialect, and acquiring a specific regional perspective in looking at the world are a part of the work for this narrative. ✱

Notes

¹ Friedrich Dieckmann goes so far as to propose dropping the expression “GDR-” or “East German literature” in favor of the expression “sächsisch-märkische Literatur.” He justifies this proposal by referring on the one hand to the regional self-consciousness of the members of the Saxon School of Poets and on the other hand to books like Peter Hacks’, in which the author identified himself with the Mark Brandenburg (282-283).

² “Hämmele” is a poor people’s local dish consisting of “Malzkaffee” (coffee substitute made from barley malt), breadcrumbs, and sugar.

³ Karl Stülpner (1762-1841) was a Saxon folk hero from the village of Scharfenstein. From 1794 to 1800, he lived as a poacher in the woods of the Ore Mountains and, according to legends, helped the very poor.

⁴ Czechowski wrote about Streubel’s death: “Niemand sucht sich seinen Tod aus. Er starb zu früh und doch zur rechten Zeit. Im Literaturbetrieb der neuen Bundesrepublik Deutschland wäre für ihn kein Platz gewesen. Er war kein Arschkriecher und kein Triumphator. Für die moderaten Töne, die er anschlug, wird es wohl jetzt und in absehbarer

Zeit kein Gehör geben” [“Nobody chooses his death. He died too early and yet at the right time. There would have been no place for him in the literary establishment of the new German Federal Republic. He was no bootlicker and no conqueror. Probably, there will be no interest for his moderate tones, neither now nor in the foreseeable future”] (“Laut” 54).

Works Cited

- Biskupek, Matthias. *Der Quotensachse: Vom unaufhaltsamen Aufstieg eines Staatsbürgers sächsischer Nationalität*. Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1996.
- Chakravorty Spivak, Gayatri. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Czechowski, Heinz. “Laut und leise.” *Gedenkminute für Manfred Streubel*. Dresden: Buchlabor, 1993. 53-54.
- . *Wüste Mark Kolmen*. Zürich: Amman, 1997.
- Dieckmann, Friedrich. “Ein deutscher Dichter aus Dresden.” *Sinn und Form* 53.5 (2001): 683-690.
- Ertl, Wolfgang. “‘Denn die Mühen der Ebene lagen hinter uns und vor uns die Mühen der Berge’: Thomas Rosenlöchers diaristische Prosa zum Ende der DDR.” *Literatur und Politische Aktualität*. Ed. Elrud Ibsch and Ferdinand van Ingen. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993. 21-37.
- Gilman, Stephen. *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas: The Intellectual and Social Landscape of La Celestina*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Hensel, Kerstin. “Ohne Angst und an allen Dummköpfen vorbei: Aus meinem Sudelbuch.” *Gute Nacht, du Schöne*. Ed. Anna Mudry. Frankfurt a.M.: Luchterhand, 1991. 116-123.
- Hundt, Markus. “Zum Prestige gesprochener Alltagssprache: Sächsisch und Schwäbisch.” *Syntax und Stilistik der Alltagssprache*. Ed. Arno Ruoff and Peter Löffelad. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997. 224-249.
- Kirsch, Rainer. *Anna Katarina oder die Nacht am Moorbusch*. Rostock: Hinstorff, 1991.
- Kubiczek, André. *Junge Talente*. Berlin: Rowohlt, 2002.
- Lindner, Rolf. “Das Ethos der Region.” *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 89.2 (1993): 169-190.
- Loest, Erich. *Swallow, mein wackerer Mustang*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1980.

- Meinel, Reinhild. "Bloß gudd, daß es de Saggse gäb'm dud." *Wende-Literatur: Bibliographie und Materialien zur Literatur der Deutschen Einheit*. Ed. Jörg Fröhling, Reinhild Meinel, Karl Riha. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1996. 204-205.
- Mickel, Karl. *Lachmunds Freunde*. Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1991.
- . *Schriften 2*. Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1990.
- Rosenlöcher, Thomas. "Sächsisch als Verlierersprache." *Ostgezeiter*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997. 11-14.
- Simon, Jana. *Denn wir sind anders*. Berlin: Rowohlt, 2002.
- Szejnmann, Chris. "'An Helligkeit ragt in Europa vor allem mei' Sachsenland vor': Prime Minister Biedenkopf and the Myth of Saxon Identity." *Recasting German Identity: Culture, Politics, and Literature in the Berlin Republic*. Ed. Stuart Taberner and Frank Finlay. Rochester: Camden House, 2002. 141-155.
- Twark, Jill. "Mathias Wedel and Matthias Biskupek: Two Satirists 'im Wandel der Wende.'" *Glossen 10*. <<http://www.dickinson.edu/departments/germn/glossen/heft10/twark.html>>.
- Wüstefeld, Michael. *Deutsche Anatomie*. Dülmen-Hiddingsel: Tende, 1996.
- . *Nackt hinter der Schutzmaske*. Berlin: Aufbau, 1990.
- . *Stadtplan*. Berlin, Aufbau, 1990.
- Zimmermann, Gerhard. "Sprachliche und außersprachliche Einschätzungen der sächsischen Umgangssprache." *Muttersprache* 102.2 (1992): 97-113.