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Map showing dividing line between East and West Germany with bordering countries.

Among many East German Marxists, who had embraced Marxism in the 1930s and opted to live in East Germany after World War II (between the 1950s until the end of the GDR in 1989), was a commitment to the Communist party that was informed by a more nuanced and sophisticated Marxism than what most party bureaucrats were exposed to. Among them, for example, the writer Stephan Hermlin as well as the literary scholar Hans Mayer both found their own unique way of accommodating themselves to and/or confronting the shortcomings of East Germany. What ties several of these more discriminating and critical Marxists together is their temporary stay in Switzerland during the 1930s and 40s – when they had escaped from Nazi Germany and the concentration camps (as Marxists and Marxists of Jewish extraction). This paper addresses how a Swiss exile experience contributed to shaping modes of thought and behavior, even decades later in East Germany.

Stephan Hermlin never declared his particular journey as a loyal Communist party member in East Germany to be the direct result of his experiences in Switzerland. And indeed, other East German Communists, such as the Marxist scholar and public intellectual Jürgen Kuczynski, followed a somewhat similar path (between conformity to the party line and demanding more openness and a more liberal Marxism) without having spent any significant time in Switzerland. Yet it is curious indeed that among those German Marxists, who later settled in the German Democratic Republic, several sought to combine their commitment to East Germany (as the better of the two post-World War II German states) with the attempt for a reformed and more humane East German socialism.

The case of the writer, poet, and literary intellectual Stephan Hermlin is thus augmented by those of Hans Mayer and even Ernst Bloch[1] as well as Hermann Budzislawski.[2] Each case is interesting and unique in its own way. Mayer, for example, became the GDR's most prolific literary scholar and a professor at the University of Leipzig, while Bloch took up a chair for philosophy at the same university. Budzislawski spent many years teaching

journalism at the same East German university, while others, such as the historian Ernst Engelberg[3] pursued a career as a history professor, curiously also at the University of Leipzig, after the end of the Nazi regime and his return to Germany. In one way or another, all of these individuals strove for a more heterodox Marxism in a rather orthodox Marxist-Leninist state. Yet they did so differently. Hermlin, for example, stayed in the GDR and continued his critical loyalty to the Communist SED regime until that state's collapse in 1990, while both Bloch and Mayer reached a point in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when they could not tolerate the narrowness and repressive nature of the regime any longer. Eventually both did not return from lecture tours abroad and settled in West Germany – albeit without ever giving up their self-definition as critical Marxists. Budzislawski, like Hermlin, never broke with the SED regime. Yet especially after his time as a university teacher in Leipzig, when he edited the famous *Weltbühne* journal in East Berlin in the 1970s, he sought out new spaces for, albeit very gentle, critiques of the East German regime. Engelberg started out as a more dogmatic Marxist-Leninist history professor in Leipzig (while also displaying a significant degree of scholarly professionalism) and only in later years pushed the boundaries of the officially sanctioned discourse in a more heterodox direction, such as in his two-volume biography of Bismarck. Engelberg played a significant role in transforming the East German historiographic view of Bismarck from a merely reactionary militarist to a more multi-faceted figure. Engelberg too stayed in the GDR to the end.

In addition to the above mentioned figures, the poet and later East German minister for cultural affairs Johannes R. Becher also spent some time in Swiss exile. He is a much more problematic figure, inasmuch as he was more openly, until his early death, associated with party dogmatism[4]. In addition, Becher, like Engelberg and Bloch, spent only a relatively short time in Switzerland. Only Mayer and Hermlin resided there for many years. This paper focuses on Hermlin because, contrary to Mayer, he remained loyal not only to the Marxist utopia of his youth but also to the German Democratic Republic.

The exact impact of the Swiss exile experience on the thought and patterns of behavior of Hermlin is complex and multi-layered. On one hand, Switzerland offered a large degree of familiarity for German-speaking refugees, given its location in central Europe as well as its linguistic and literary-cultural traditions. Both Hermlin and Mayer were literary intellectuals and as such deeply embedded in the German language. Despite their fluency in French and English, both appreciated this common ground as a context in which to think and work, as well as providing a potential readership for their books and articles. Living in Switzerland in all likelihood also sharpened Hermlin and Mayer's sense of perceiving themselves as part and parcel of the German literary and cultural tradition, while at the same time developing an inner distance to Germany as a state

entity. Switzerland, after all, claims German as one of the two official languages but does not belong to the German realm of statehood. Thus when both embraced the new East German state, after the fall of the Nazi regime, they did so because of their attachment to Germaness as a *cultural* over a *political-national* category. Their support of the separate East German state was not in conflict with their loyalty to the conceptual unity of German culture and literature.

This complex attachment to Germaness in cultural terms was more pronounced with Hermlin. The writer Günter Kunert, his one-time friend and confidant, remembers Hermlin's overwhelming love for German literature. When, during the GDR's existence, Kunert ran into Hermlin in a Tyrolean hotel lobby, Hermlin wrote in the guest book "Stephan Hermlin, Berlin, Germany."[5] This was particularly curious, given Hermlin's rock-solid commitment to the East German state. Hermlin identified himself thus foremost as a figure of German literature and culture – not primarily or exclusively as an East German writer. It stands to reason that his years of exile in Switzerland had already contributed to, prepared, and enabled him to feel and think of himself as German in cultural terms, while remaining opposed to the German Nazi state as a political entity. This differentiating self-identification would later develop and manifest itself in his strong support the East German state, which ironically compelled him to inadvertently subvert the regime, because of the aspects that he deemed profoundly defective.

Switzerland was one of the first destinations for those leaving Nazi Germany, beginning in the early thirties, due to the political and racial persecution that they faced in their home country. Yet despite Switzerland's reputation, as a more liberal alternative to Germany in the nineteenth century and its quasi status as a classical country of exile, asylum seekers kept encountering significant challenges and obstacles. Chief among them was the Swiss fear of a belligerent Nazi Germany and its allies. This led to calls of a *geistige Landesverteidigung*, a cultural and spiritual defense of "Swissness."[6]

One must remain aware of the temptation to reduce the immensely complex and indeed often contradictory Swiss approach to refugees to simple formulas. Policies and attitudes changed over time and differed from region to region, as well as from milieu to milieu.[7] Thus, the federal nature of Switzerland made possible significant latitude in enforcing policy. More liberal cantons, such as Schaffhausen, Basel, or St. Gallen were more accommodating than say Thurgau. Yet, despite all nuances and changing circumstances, two continuities crystallized early on. Firstly, Switzerland required those who sought refuge from Nazi persecution there to not engage in political activities whatsoever, and, secondly, Communist refuges, including those suspected of Communist leanings, were not considered

worthy of asylum.[8] For those of Communist persuasion, such complex and hostile conditions in Switzerland were accompanied by what characterized the entire German-speaking Communist refugee community: the challenge to find one's way in the midst of ever-changing party directives and the self-understanding of belonging to the *avant-garde* of the proletariat. The stresses and challenges of exile life were to be borne with an iron resolve and stoic determination. Both the exiled leadership of the German Communist Party as well as the Soviet party leaders in Moscow put pressure on the Communist refugees to make heroic sacrifices in resisting the Nazi regime, while accommodating themselves to such new developments as the Stalinist show trials and the Soviet non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany.[9] The fate of more independent Left-Wingers, who either permanently or for a time rejected both the official Communist option as well as that of the Social Democrats, was a little better. If they were not previously registered as either Anarcho-syndicalists or party Communists, they were seen with less suspicious eyes.[10]

Yet, the hierarchical command structure of the Communist resistance also offered comfort and a sense of community in a potentially inhospitable exile environment. Many Communists, including Stephan Hermlin, derived a sense of belonging and security while belonging to the party, especially in this time of stress and banishment. Hermlin's loyalties to the cause ripened in this period, amid this community, and may go a long way in explaining his willingness to later contradict (albeit with great diplomacy, discretion, and tact) the party line in the GDR – for the sake of his principles.

Hermlin was one of the GDR's most established writers. His literary efforts, although relatively small in volume, are carefully crafted and well respected. He had also made a name for himself as a sensitive translator of French, Spanish, and English poetry, as well as prose. In addition, Hermlin published several volumes of literary essays and edited anthologies. His moral authority rested upon his identity as an *Altkommunist*, who had joined the party long before the establishment of the GDR in 1949, and as an active fighter against the Nazi regime. Hermlin became an enigma in the GDR, as a personal friend of orthodox party leader Erich Honecker as well as an increasingly vocal opponent of party dogmatism. He actively supported open dissidents when their human rights were violated, such as the poet Wolf Biermann, while remaining supportive of the GDR as a socialist alternative to West Germany. Hermlin always identified with the GDR and its political system. Thus while publicly defending some dissidents, he never shared more fundamental critiques of the GDR.

As a public intellectual in East Germany, three moments of Stephan Hermlin's confrontation with the SED regime are significant: in illustrating his superficially contradictory dual identity as a GDR adherent and critic.

These include his initiation of an open protest against the expulsion of the dissident song-writer Wolf Biermann from East Germany in 1976; his initiative for an international conference of writers against nuclear proliferation in 1981; and his role in the Ossietzky affair, wherein several high school students were expelled for drawing attention to the discrepancy between East Germany's celebration of the pacifist Carl von Ossietzky and its support of Soviet militarism. These three cases illustrate how Hermlin functioned as a locus of symbolic communication in East German society at large, by intellectually, artistically, and journalistically challenging party orthodoxy. Hermlin's writings, as well as his cosmopolitan manners and connections, were intended to legitimize East Germany both domestically and abroad. Yet his open critiques of the status quo underscored not only his support of the GDR's ideals of justice and equality, but also the gap between those ideals and the GDR's deficiencies. Thus, he drew attention both inadvertently and intentionally to the contrived and artificial nature of the Soviet-styled SED regime, in some ways de-naturalizing and delegitimizing it.

Background: Searching for the Bridge Between *Geist* and *Macht*

Born under the name of Rudolf on April 13, 1915 to David and Lola Leder, Hermlin grew up in a *großbürgerlich* environment in the Saxon industrial city of Chemnitz as well as in Berlin. The family fortune was based on textiles; they had lucrative real estate holdings, several servants, and a growing art collection. Young Rudolf was sent to a boarding school in Switzerland in 1925, and he attended both the *Staatsgymnasium* in Chemnitz, between 1930-1932, and later in Berlin. There he was expelled for publishing a left-leaning article in the journal *Schulkampf*. In 1931, Rudolf Leder joined the Socialist Student Association (*Sozialistischer Schülerbund*) as well as the Communist Party Youth Organization (KJVD). In addition, he published his first poem under the pseudonym "Stephan Hermlin." Given the economic decline of his family during the Depression as well as conscious efforts to delineate himself from his bourgeois background, Hermlin learned the trade of printer between 1933-35. During that time he was actively involved in underground resistance efforts against the Nazi regime, which led to his emigration, beginning in 1936, to Egypt, Palestine, England, Spain, and finally France. Hermlin remained in France between 1937 and 1943, joining the French war effort in the auxiliary forces against the Nazis until he was eventually interned and threatened with extradition to Germany. In April of 1943, he succeeded in fleeing to Switzerland and stayed there until 1945.

In Switzerland Hermlin began his literary career, working for French *Résistance* journals as well as editing, together with his mentor and friend Hans Mayer, the periodical *Über die Grenzen*. It was in Switzerland too, where Hermlin published his first major collection of poetry, *Zwölf Balladen von den Großen Städten*. In September 1945 Hermlin returned to war-torn Germany, finding employment as a radio journalist in Frankfurt am Main and publishing his first short story, *Der Leutnant Yorck von Wartenburg*.[11] In 1947 Hermlin left Frankfurt for Berlin, settling in the Soviet sector and joining the Communist controlled SED. There he worked as an editor for the satirical journal *Ulenspiegel* and the literary publication *Aufbau*. Within a short time, he established himself as a freelance writer, creating poetry (until 1958), prose, travel reports, and essays. Given his aspirations for a socialist future, Hermlin decided to link his personal life with the fate of the emerging German Democratic Republic. He remained there beyond its collapse in 1989, until his death in 1997, publishing highly regarded translations of French, Spanish, English, and American authors. His artistic efforts have been widely recognized, as his simultaneous memberships within the East and West German Art Academies indicate. In addition, Hermlin was one of the vice presidents of the International Pen Centre.

Despite his socialist convictions and position of influence within the GDR, Hermlin ran into frequent conflicts with party martinets, as he was increasingly concerned about constraints on artistic freedom. At the Writers Congress in 1956, for example, Hermlin stirred up controversy by calling for the publication of the collected works of such Western "bourgeois" writers as Jean-Paul Sartre, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and Ernest Hemingway. While becoming more and more introverted and pessimistic about the socialist project of the GDR, he wrote many essays problematizing the narrowness of official East German cultural policy. Hermlin also promoted younger writers, who often differed radically from his own style and aesthetic sensibilities, such as in 1962 when he organized a reading of experimental poetry by Wolf Biermann, Volker Braun, Bernd Jentzsch, as well as Sarah and Rainer Kirsch. The SED regime strongly criticized Hermlin's unorthodox approach, and he was forced to resign from his positions in the Academy of the Arts as well as the German-Soviet Friendship organization.

Hermlin's situation improved somewhat with Erich Honecker's rise to the leadership of the SED in 1971. Honecker and Hermlin shared a mutual respect for one another, and Hermlin used his special ties to the leader to get around party bureaucrats on behalf of fellow writers and on matters of artistic freedom. In 1976 Hermlin initiated the famous Biermann Petition, which was signed by many of East Germany's most important writers, artists, and intellectuals. Yet despite his personal ties to Honecker, Hermlin

was met with suspicion and hostility by hardliners – as his Stasi file illustrates. During the 1980s, he continued to work toward expanding the space for artistic freedom. He, like many others in the East and West, was deeply concerned about the arms race and, in 1981, organized a peace conference of writers, scientists, and intellectuals from both German states. Hermlin also offered his assistance to many East Germans, who became increasingly concerned about the spread of right-wing tendencies, among an increasingly disaffected youth, as well as Soviet-style militarism. Thus in 1988 he attempted to mediate between pacifist youth and the authorities at a Berlin high school. The case eventually involved the East German education ministry run by Margot Honecker, Party chair Erich Honecker's wife.

Beyond the collapse of the GDR in 1989 and German unification in 1990, Hermlin remained committed to his ideals of social justice. He joined the post-Communist PDS, largely out of "solidarity" for ostracized former Communists. At the end of his life, he was subject to massive efforts (on the part of the old West German *feuilleton* establishment, chiefly Karl Corino) to expose his work as little more than kitschy *Gesinnungsästhetik* ("politicized aesthetic") and question discrepancies in his semi-autobiographical writings, most notably *Abendlicht*. Corino was not the only one voicing questions about Hermlin's official biography. Alfred Kantorowicz, for example, challenged Hermlin's claimed participation in the Spanish Civil War.[12] This indeed speaks to Hermlin's, at times, risky merger of autobiographical and poetic elements.

It has been frequently noted that there was a gap between Hermlin's revolutionary commitments and his actual artistic sensibilities. Marcel Reich-Ranicki and Jürgen P. Wallmann are the foremost examples of this approach. In 1966, Wallmann remarked acerbically that, "[n]o, Stephan Hermlin is not a revolutionary, he is a *Schöngeist* [aesthete]. He wants to fight: for progress, humanism, and socialism. For that he intends to use the trombone, but – miraculously! [sic] – he only gets harp melodies . . . ."[13] In hindsight, Hermlin may have been naïve about his project of merging revolutionary politics with aesthetically sophisticated multi-layered prose and poetry. Yet as the literary historian Wolfgang Ertl has argued, one cannot divorce Hermlin's poetics from their historical context. Thus especially his earliest pieces, the farthest removed from present sensibilities, must be recontextualized within the threat of Nazism, the anti-Fascist resistance, and the hopes of a democratic and socialist future after WWII. We must "ask what effects those poems had at the moment of their appearance and why they were written in the first place."[14]

Zwölf Balladen von den Grossen Städten appeared at the beginning of 1945 in Switzerland, marking the beginning of Hermlin's life as a writer. Like many other German intellectuals who were opposed to Nazism,

Hermlin hoped to contribute to the establishment of an anti-fascist and democratic society with his artistic efforts. He called for "a heroic humanist poetry" committed to "the cause of freedom." Thus, Hermlin dedicated his literary efforts to the political project of rebuilding German culture and language after the barbarous descent into Nazism. He criticized the new poetry [after the end of WWII] with its . . . attempt to copy what cannot be copied, fluctuating between plagiarism and parody. . . . [Those poets'] inability to adequately express the recent past and present is most likely linked to the fact that fascism and war were suffered through, but not actively opposed.[15]

In contrast to the German situation, Hermlin celebrated the case of France, where artists and intellectuals "actively" and "militantly" struggled against the threat of Fascism and fought in the underground. Hermlin lamented the degree to which German poetry had metaphysically retreated, rather than advocating on behalf of humanistic values. As alternatives he recommended a diverse range of authors, from Vladimir Majakowski to Walt Whitman and Paul Eluard. Among the German writers in the two years following the end of WWII, Hermlin praised Günther Eich and Karl Krolow, among others. It was their "directness" and sense of the "specific" that Hermlin praised, while most other German poets had dwelt on a vague inwardness. Similarly, while Hermlin did not reject nature poetry *a priori* (on the contrary, he acknowledged how metaphors and allusions could be "used to open up new venues for perceiving new realities") he complained that ". . . today they prevent [us] from seeing reality."[16]

Hermlin's poetic efforts, as articulated in *Zwölf Balladen*, are far from militant political and ideological statements. These are carefully crafted, revealing a high degree of artistic sensibility and familiarity with European literary traditions from the Middle Ages into Modernity. His ideal was not to replace "inwardness" with political agitation but, like Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley whom Hermlin immensely admired,

> to harmonize once and for all that which cannot be fully grasped, that which is perennially eclipsed, that which can only be intimated through music and poetry, the dream, the quiet, the incoming tides of silence, in short everything that makes up the world of lyrics, with the world of the visible.[17]

Hermlin drew on a broad range of aesthetic traditions, including French surrealist poetry and German baroque modes of expression. He was as engaged by the prose of Martin Luther as the sensibilities of Hölderlin and attempted to synthesize those influences into a new aesthetic, which would neither celebrate apolitical inwardness nor glorify war and the nation but

would instead help to define and defend an emerging civil society. His second book of poetry, entitled *Die Strassen der Flucht* and published in 1946 in South-West Germany, by and large received very positive reviews in both the East and West until 1950. He was heralded as "the writer of our generation" by a variety of critics, such as Kurt Heyer, W. Merklin as well as the poet Karl Krolow. In the East, Heyer especially praised Hermlin's *Zweiundzwanzig Balladen* that appeared in 1947 Berlin as indicative of a new poetic voice, mindful of the atrocities of the Nazi regime, the heroism of resistance, and warning about the dangers of lethargy.[18] In the West, Karl Krolow focused his review on Hermlin's skilled conciliation of aesthetically demanding form with progressive and humanist content. Hermlin thus contributed to de-provincializing and humanizing German poetry, after its corruption by ideological impulses on the political Right, including National Socialism.[19] Yet despite the initially rather encouraging response to his work, Hermlin published less and less poetry after 1952, stopping altogether in the late 1950s. He may have feared that his poetic efforts could no longer satisfy political needs without becoming overly formulaic and stale.

Hermlin co-published, in 1947 with his friend and mentor the non-dogmatic Marxist literary scholar Hans Mayer, a collection of essays entitled *Ansichten über einige neue Schriftsteller und Bücher.* In essence this collection contained the typescripts of Hermlin and Mayer's radio essays, given in Frankfurt since December 1945. The general tone of these essays reveals their openness to literary innovation, while works saturated with Right-wing cultural pessimism were treated negatively. Hermlin and Mayer sought to introduce German audiences to exiled progressive German writers, as well as representatives of foreign literature who were ignored or directly opposed by the Nazi regime. To a large extent their focus was broad, not only citing Soviet writers such as VladimirMayakovsky and Ilya Ehrenburg but also Thornton Wilder, John Steinbeck, and Harry Brown. Hermlin and Mayer also elaborated on the *oeuvre* of Franz Kafka and discussed the post-war writings of the philosopher Karl Jaspers in a differentiated fashion. As became so typical for the later Hermlin, he and Mayer displayed a significant degree of enthusiasm toward new literary and experimental influences, staying firmly rooted in their commitment to the process of intellectual and cultural democratization. In addition to prose and poetry, Hermlin continued to publish collections of essays and interviews throughout his life in the GDR, thus mediating between literary heritage and the contemporary literary scene. These efforts were not "scholarly" in the strictest sense, illustrating Hermlin's role as a public intellectual and *homme de lettres*. Hermlin considered it his calling not just to promote his own artistic works but those of other writers. Already in his 1948 travel account of the Soviet Union, Hermlin elaborates on his ideal reader, "the active,

responding reader, who listens well but also speaks . . .."[20] Hermlin saw the new "Soviet citizen" as embodying this ideal and regarded the role of literature, as the communication between authors and readers and the resulting development of mature and largely self-directed readers, as essential to the formation of a civic society. The world of literature, its presentation and interpretation, was too important to him to be left to professional critics and/or party dogmatists.

Among Hermlin's more notable short stories is *Der Leutnant Yorck von Wartenburg*, written in the fall of 1944 in Switzerland and published in 1945 in the western part of occupied Germany. In this story, Hermlin deals with the failed attempt on Hitler's life (July 20, 1944). Partially inspired by Ambrose Bierce's *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,* Hermlin (unfamiliar with the particular details of the conservative officers' anti-Nazi plot) re-imagines it. The protagonist, an aristocratic German officer, is sentenced to death by the Nazis and rescued by the Red Army at the last minute. He believed that the most noble and self-sacrificing elements of the German aristocratic tradition were best understood and protected by the Soviet Union; only there would the aristocratic ideals, namely "honor, loyality, duty, *Heimat* be fully internalized."[21] This of course was wishful thinking – as were Hermlin's hopes that all layers of German society would approve of and participate in the anti-Nazi uprising,[22] including the entire *Wehrmacht*.

In 1947, Hermlin published *Reise eines Malers in Paris*.[23] This short story, while involving the struggle of left-anarchists like Ernst Toller and the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War, is at its centre almost an apolitical and surrealist narrative of a painter for whom the distinction between dream and reality collapses. In 1949, Hermlin wrote *Die Zeit der Gemeinsamkeit*, centering on the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of 1943 and celebrating its heroic resistance against the Nazis. 1950 marked the first appearance of *Der Weg der Bolschewiki*, chronicling the outbreak of Soviet POW's from a German camp. Eventually all of the escapees were captured and killed, not just by the SS but also with the help of the German population at large. This plot deviates significantly from Hermlin's previous idealism, regarding the anti-Nazi sympathies of most Germans, as articulated in *Der Leutnant Yorck von Wartenburg*. It might also shed light upon his decision to support the emerging SED regime, with its dictatorial methods of governing East Germany, given that Hermlin and many other refugees and victims of the Nazi regime had absolutely no reason to trust in the ability of the German people to govern themselves responsibly, especially so soon after the Nazis.

Hermlin's critical eye was also cast upon the West. With his *Die Unterschrift* of 1950, he criticized establishment pressures upon those Westerners who had signed the Stockholm Convention against the Atom

bomb. Mainstream newspapers were exceedingly critical of those who had collected signatures. Hermlin's convictions continued to defy easy categorization. He tackled the subject of the 1953 working-class uprising against the SED regime in East Germany in his *Die Kommandeuse*, by focusing on a female former Nazi concentration camp guard, who was freed during the chaos of the uprising and built an icon to an innocent person unjustly imprisoned by Communist tyranny. As she is set free by the demonstrators, she begins to look forward to a restoration of the Nazi state and the continuation of her duties in the camp system. This story was rejected, by and large, in both East and West. The Western critics objected to Hermlin linking the demonstrators, against SED excesses, with a former Nazi camp guard, while the mainstream East German critics rejected what they called Hermlin's overly nuanced and psychologically differentiated treatment of the guard. This story illustrates how Hermlin had internalised the dogmatic interpretations of the SED regime, which automatically de-legitimized any challenge to its rule as "fascist" in nature. Hermlin reflects this by centering his story on the camp guard. Yet he is too articulate, as an artist, to not flesh out that guard as a human being, refusing to one-dimensionally demonize her. *Die Kommandeuse* serves as an intriguing window into how Hermlin struggled to harmonize Stalinist politics with aesthetic sensibilities. Naturally, his symbiosis was deemed "too aesthetic" and not Stalinistic enough. Of course in later years, Hermlin approached the events of June 1953 in a very different and more even-handed way. But he remained emotionally attached to the sentiment that one could legitimately call for improvements and reforms within the system of the GDR. However calling for a radical transformation of GDR society was never something Hermlin would or could support.

In 1959, he finally published *Arkadien*, which he had written a decade earlier. This novella deals with an episode of the partisan activities of the *Franc-Tireurs et Partisans* in *Departement Cantal* against the German occupiers. Here again, Hermlin celebrates French resistance. The same year Hermlin published *Die erste Reihe*, in which he chronicled the fate of thirty young Germans who lost their lives in the struggle against the Nazi regime. Not all of the thirty cases, however, were reflective of the image of anti-Fascist resistance as officially approved of by the SED regime in the 1950s. Images in the mainstream centred on Communist resistance, however. Hermlin also included other examples, such as the case of the Mormon Helmuth Hübener. Hermlin openly identifies Hübener and his two co-conspirators, in his very positive miniature, as "members of a small sect."[24] Those who could read between the lines knew that in East Germany authorities frequently viewed this sect as a continuation of the CIA. Hermlin thus openly deviated from party dogma.

The 1960s marked the appearance of two major novellas by Hermlin. *In einer dunklen Welt* of 1965, he once again deals with the theme of anti-fascist resistance in Germany, Austria, and France. The short story *Corneliusbrücke*, written in 1968, addresses the murder of Communist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg by right-wing militia near his parental home in Berlin in January 1919. This story contains autobiographic as well as fictitious elements.

Hermlin wrote four larger pieces during the 1970s. Among them are *Scardanelli* (1970), a radio play dealing with the eighteenth-century poet Hölderlin's break down when he realizes that there is little room for art in a world of power politics and philistinism. This was followed by two smaller pieces (*Die Agronauten* and *Mein Friede*) as well as *Abendlicht,* simultaneously published in Leipzig and West Berlin in 1979. Much like *Corneliusbrücke*, *Abendlicht* is also a complex collage of life-historical and invented elements. In essence, Hermlin describes the journey of an upper-class aesthete to the Communist movement, which to Hermlin was the only way to preserve cultural refinement and liberalism in light of the apparent failure of the bourgeois establishment to live up to its own ideals. This novella is key to understanding Hermlin's aesthetic project, his ideological choice of Marxism, as well as his political decision to support the GDR.In the late 1970s, Hermlin also published a highly acclaimed anthology of German literature, ranging from Martin Luther to Karl Liebknecht. *Deutsches Lesebuch: Von Luther bis Liebknecht* came out in 1976, simultaneously in West Germany and in the GDR.[25] The influential historian and essayist Golo Mann wittily observed, in the leading West German conservative paper FAZ (in an otherwise very positive review), that Hermlin's sub-title is as odd as,

> From Adam to Adenauer' or 'From Beethoven to Brandt.' … All in all this *Deutsche Lesebuch* is not just a well considered but indeed a marvellous selection. I am amazed about the range of [Hermlin's] knowledge: his, if not scholarly then deeply literary, sensibility, his *Herzensbildung*. One has to be deeply immersed in order to come up with such a concentrated selection.[26]Golo Mann stood considerably to the right of his famous father Thomas and his siblings. Golo, who had openly moderate conservative views and a strong distaste for Communism in all its colors, concluded that "Hermlin's well-rounded and inexhaustible, liberal, and humanist anthology belong[ed] equally in the GDR as in the Federal Republic."[27] This review is generally indicative of the friendly reception of Hermlin's anthology in both the East and West across the political spectrum.

Conclusion

Hermlin regarded himself as a loyal citizen of the GDR, despite the growing distance between his own aesthetic vision and what was officially allowed, even during moments of relative "liberalization" in that state. He was not a dissident, nor did he ever translate his uneasiness with the SED regime and its policies into direct confrontation. In this regard, he differed from open dissidents who "burned their bridges" – or whose bridges were burned for them, like Wolf Biermann. Hermlin also differed from writers and intellectuals like Stefan Heym, who supported the idea of the GDR as a socialist alternative to West Germany, while also openly criticizing it. Hermlin preferred to address grievances carefully, mediating between party functionaries and those who were critical of the system. This "timid" approach tied his hands in some ways, as in the Biermann case. By opting to seek a solution "within the system" – approaching party leader Honecker and the party paper *Neues Deutschland* – Hermlin could only go so far. However at other times, Hermlin's penchant for dialogue rendered more directly positive results. When, for example, the Czech dissident writer Václav Havel was imprisoned in early 1989, the GDR PEN Centre debated how to respond. According to the relevant Stasi files, writer Christoph Hein urged an immediate note of protest, to be forwarded to the Czech government in Prague. Several writers and functionaries, including the deputy minister for cultural affairs, Klaus Höpcke, rejected this as unrealistic and counterproductive. Eventually, Hermlin joined the debate and succeeded in bringing all sides together in a compromise. The GDR section of PEN was set to officially protest against Havel's treatment, but not in Prague. Instead, the letter of protest was sent to the International PEN Club in London and demanded the release of Havel.[28] Hermlin's compromise, while far from perfect, ensured that the GDR PEN, for the first time, protested the imprisonment of a Soviet bloc dissident and did so against the explicit wishes and policies of the SED regime.

Hermlin's role as the initiator of the 1976 petition on behalf of Wolf Biermann, his role as the organizer of the Berlin Peace Conference in 1981, and his intervention in the Ossietzky Affaire, illustrate his role as a catalyst for critics in the GDR. Like the prominent Jürgen Kuczynski, Hermlin was cautious and proceeded with care in testing the orthodoxy and resolve of the regime.

Hermlin was a friend, of sorts, to party leader Erich Honecker and thus had access to the corridors of power. Yet despite all of this, many inside the SED regime continued to regard Hermlin as an enemy. The ideologically dogmatic writer Dieter Noll told the Stasi on February 2, 1982, that Hermlin was part of the "literary opposition" that subverted the GDR.[29] While the overzealous Noll might have overstated Hermlin's "oppositional" role, his function can be qualified as leading to a form of loyal subversion, which

grew out of Hermlin's "*spätbürgerlich*" and as such *bildungsbürgerlich* aesthetic.

The apparent duality in his identity as both a loyal ***and*** dissenting East German citizen seems to have begun in exile in an earlier incarnation. No doubt, leaving his homeland altered and augmented his sense of self. As an artist, understanding and articulating his identity was of central importance, as he struggled in his writing to find archetypes to express what became true for him, in the extraordinary circumstances of the last century. He was familiar early on with the contradictions of being one thing while being another – experiencing what it was to be a German but not a *German,* while in Swiss exile. This undoubtedly produced echoes of what would come later on in the GDR. While in Switzerland, he identified so wholly with a German sense of culture, while rejecting the Germaness that had rejected him, namely Nazism and the Nazi state. Through his convictions to Marxism he found his way back into a political realm, where he could belong. By participating in an artistic tradition larger than himself, he expressed his political and philosophical hopes for humanity, finding solace in artistic production and active propaganda in times of distress. His political ideas were thus performed by an artistic identity that allowed for complications. Throughout his life he seemed increasingly resigned to these "contradictions" involving dissent and accommodation. Perhaps had he not been exiled to a German context outside of Germany, the complexity of his identity would not have matured in the same way and the human rights concerns that he cautiously but steadfastly raised would not have been mediated or broached to the same degrees of success.

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Endnotes:

[1] For a blanced overview, see Mario Keβler, *Exil und Nach-Exil: Vetriebene Intellektuelle im 20. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2002).
[2] For a useful list of German-speaking refugees in Switzerland between 1933 and 1945 see Werner Mittenzwei, *Exil in der Schweiz* (Frankfurt/M., Röderberg-Verlag GmbH, 1981), 423-432.
[3] For a good overview of Engelberg's career, see Mario Keβler *Exilerfahrung in Wissenschaft und Politik* (Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2001).
[4] For a nuanced account of Becher's life, see Jens-Fietje Dwars *Abgrund des Widerspruchs : Das Leben des Johannes R. Becher* (Aufbau Verlag Berlin,1998), as well as Johannes R. Becher: *Triumph und Verfall* Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003.
[5]Günter Kunert, "Nachruf. Dichter zweier Herren. Günter Kunert zum Tod von Stephan Hermlin," in *Der Spiegel* 16 (1997): 223.
[6] Quellenband.

[7] Werner Mittenzwei, *Exil in der Schweiz* (Frankfurt/M., Röderberg-Verlag GmbH, 1981), 20-24.
[8] For an excellent overview of the exile situation in Switzerland during the Nazis years, see Hermann Wichers, "Schweiz," in *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration 1933-1945*, edited by Claus-Dieter Krohn (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 375-383.
[9]Klaus-Michael Mallmann, "Kommunisten," *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1998), 493-506.
[10] Jan Foitzik, "Linke Kleingruppen," in Ibid., 506-518.
[11] In 1946.
[12] Alfred Kantorowicz, *Deutsches Tagebuch*, vol. 2 (Munich: Kindler Verlag 1961), 643-644.
[13] Jürgen P. Wallmann, *Neue deutsche Hefte*. 2 (1966), 146.
[14] Wolfgang Ertl, *Stephan Hermlin und die Tradition*, (Bern: P. Lang, 1966), 9-10.
[15]Stephan Hermlin, "Wo bleibt die junge Dichtung?", in Aufbau 11 (1947): 341-42.
[16] Ibid., 341-42.
[17] Idem, Hermlin, "Von der Musik Shelleys," in *Das Goldene Tor*, (Feb., 1947): 108-109.
[18]Kurt Heyer, "Stephan Hermlin – Dichter unserer Zeit," in *Start* (26 Sept.,1947).
[19] Karl Krolow, "Die Lyrik Stephan Hermlins," in *Thema* 8 (1950): 29.
[20]Hermlin, *Russische Eindrücke* (Berlin: Verlag Kultur und Fortschritt, 1948), 49-50.
[21]Idem, Hermlin, "Der Leutnant Yorck von Wartenburg," in *Entscheidungen: Sämtliche* Erzählungen, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 33
[22] Hermlin coincides the return of the protagonist to Germany, from his from his stay among his liberators in the Soviet Union, with popular uprisings against the Nazi regime in all regions and layers of society.
[23] In Wiesbaden/Hesse.
[24] Idem, Hermlin, *Die erste Reihe*, (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1951), 91.
[25] Hanser Verlag and Reclam Verlag respectively.
[26] Golo Mann, "Ein wahrhaft deutsches Lesebuch: Zu Stephan Hermlin, 'Deutsches Lesebuch"'in FAZ 11 (Dec. 1976), as reprinted in *Golo Mann, Marcel Reich-Ranicki: Enthusiasten der Literatur*, (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, 2000), 202.
[27] Ibid, 204.
[28] BStU, ZA, ZAG 4592, Bl. 31-33.
[29] BStU, ZA, AGMS 5323/85, Bd. I/1,Bl.67.