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# The Figure of the Germanist in Anglophone Fiction and Film

From Elisabeth von Arnim to Deborah Levy

This article sets out to explore how experts in German Studies, with or without a professional training or specialism, are portrayed in a range of British and American novels and a handful of films produced between the first decade of the twentieth century and the present day, that is between the eve of the First World War and Britain's decision to leave the European Union, which may mark an equally momentous turning point for the UK. In this way the article traces the evolution of Anglophone attitudes to Germany as they are refracted in this rich source material, which is being systematically examined for the first time. In contrast to these fictional figures who usually mediate empathetically between the two cultures, as leading Germanists in France and Italy are also said to do, their real-life counterparts in British public life more often remain focussed on twentieth-century history, in particular the Third Reich. The article argues that society, at least in the shape of books written about Germany and Austria or getting translated from German, is at last following fiction in moving beyond a fixation on Nazis. But writers and film-makers took a lead in imagining an interaction with Germany which entails both a critical re-evaluation of self and recognition of a shared heritage.

Anglophone Germanists are cultural intermediaries between the German- and English-speaking worlds, working variously as translators, travel or culinary writers and foreign correspondents, historians, authors, visual artists and film directors, as well as teachers and scholars. German Studies in its multiple manifestations traces its roots to the mid-nineteenth century when interest in German writing and Germany itself was growing among the reading public and the first university departments in the subject were established.<sup>1</sup> Notable English-lan-

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<sup>1</sup> German Studies has been taught at the University of London, for example, since 1826. See John L. Flood and Anne Simon, *Glanz und Abglanz: Two Centuries of German Studies in the University of London* (London: University of London Press, 2017).

guage publications in the field ranged from scholarship (George Henry Lewes' *Life of Goethe*, 1855), to travel (John Addington Symonds' *Our Life in the Swiss Highlands*, 1892), and comic novels by Mark Twain (*A Tramp Abroad*, 1880) and Jerome K. Jerome (*Three Men on the Bummel*, 1900). Responding in part no doubt to the demands of readers, prominent Germanists in the second half of the twentieth century have often played rather different roles, often contributing to the mythologisation of recent German history in the British and American mind-set with its focus on the two world wars and, latterly, though to a lesser degree, the Stasi. For example, the translator Michael Hofmann (b. 1957) has introduced a large range of modern German authors to English readers, but his most successful book is his English version of Hans Fallada's tale of anti-Nazi resistance, *Jeder stirbt für sich allein* (1947), which led to an international renaissance in Fallada's fortunes.<sup>2</sup> The most influential UK Germanist is arguably W. G. Sebald (1944–2001), who wrote nearly always in German but made his name with the Holocaust-themed novel *The Emigrants*, the translator Michael Hulse's English version of *Die Ausgewanderten*, depicting a quartet of male characters who fled Germany in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> One of the most successful former students of German is the novelist John Le Carré (1931–2020), who in turn portrays Germanists in his fiction and has often functioned as a cultural ambassador between the UK and Germany.<sup>4</sup> The aftermath of Nazism and the Cold War are the subject of his hugely successful spy thrillers with a German setting. Post-Nazi dysfunction and traumatic back stories are a main-spring in the Vienna-based fiction of US author John Irving (b. 1942), who learnt German at Vienna University in 1963/64. The fake Germanist in the 1985 novel *White Noise* by Don DeLillo (b. 1936) discovered that American interest in Nazism is all but inexhaustible. DeLillo's Jack Gladney is the inventor of 'Hitler Studies' with a dark secret: he knows no German and relies on translated sources.<sup>5</sup> Through satire DeLillo is making a serious point about recent German history being taught in a context which divorces it from Germany itself.

The mythologisation of German history could appear all-pervasive during the Cold War. As a postgraduate student Timothy Garton Ash (b.1955) was originally interested in writing a thesis on Berlin under the Nazis but once on a research visit in the city he switched to the more immediate topic of behaviour under the dictatorship of the SED. In the West he interviewed Albert Speer, whose life has

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<sup>2</sup> Hans Fallada, *Alone in Berlin*, transl. by Michael Hofmann (London: Penguin, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> W. G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*, transl. by Michael Hulse (London: Harvill, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Through interviews in *Der Spiegel*, for example, and other press outlets, or by presenting the annual German Teacher Award at the German Embassy in 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Viking, 1985).

been much examined by fiction and non-fiction writers of English,<sup>6</sup> in the East Litz Kohlmann, the first wife of the British spy, Kim Philby, whose double life exercised an endless fascination on Le Carré. Garton Ash presents his experiences in Berlin in the late 1970s and early 1980s as if he were himself a character in a novel by Graham Greene or treading in the footsteps of Christopher Isherwood. In the GDR he was the object of the Stasi's interests, hence the title of his memoir, *The File: A Personal History* (1997), but he had also been approached by the British secret services, whom he claims to have turned down. Garton Ash believes that he inhabits a period of history which began in the aftermath of World War One: "at the Deutsches Theater or the Volksbühne I found the kind of sly cultural resistance so familiar from my studies of Berlin in the 1930s. Sometimes it was the very same theatres, and even the same texts."<sup>7</sup> In a much discussed review essay on the film *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006, dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck), Garton Ash later complained that nearly two decades after German reunification, the equation in popular thinking between Germany and totalitarianism was intensifying. Anna Funder (b. 1966) in her best-selling *Stasiland* (2003) encouraged English readers to view the East German republic exclusively through the lens of its secret police.<sup>8</sup> 'Nazi' and 'Stasi' almost even rhymed, Garton Ash pointed out, as he called for a re-think of a state of affairs he to which he had arguably contributed as much as Funder and von Donnersmarck.<sup>9</sup>

In 1990 when the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher wanted academic advice on whether the UK should fear German reunification she turned to five male academic historians rather than journalists, writers or literary scholars. As well as the freshly qualified Garton Ash, they were the Canadian Gordon Craig (1913–2005), Oxford professors Norman Stone (1941–2019) and Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914–2003), and the German-Jewish American academic Fritz Stern (1926–2016). They all insisted that apprehension of an expanded Federal Republic was misplaced. Would the head of government of any other country have made such a gathering so exclusive? The leading French contemporary Germanist, an active cultural diplomat and advisor to President Mitterrand, was the writer and novelist Michel Tournier (1924–2016), his Italian counterpart the writer and academic, Claudio Magris (b. 1939). Both presented their ideas on the twentieth-century culture of the German-speaking countries from the inside rather than as external observers of a foreign land, as Garton Ash does in *The File* and Le Carré and Isher-

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6 E. g. in biography: Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (London: Macmillan, 1995) and drama: David Edgar, *Albert Speer* (London: Hern, 2000).

7 Timothy Garton-Ash, *The File: A Personal History*, p. 62.

8 Anna Funder, *Stasiland: Stories from behind the Berlin Wall* (London: Granta, 2003).

9 Timothy Garton Ash, "The Stasi on our Minds," *The New York Review of Books*, 31 May 2007.

wood did in their fiction. They sparked controversy in Germany or Austria, Magris by identifying what he termed the “Habsburg myth” in Austrian literature,<sup>10</sup> Tournier for his depiction of the aesthetic attraction of Nazism. But Tournier’s *Le Roi des aulnes* (1970) is about a Frenchman who is drawn to Nazi behaviour and ideology.<sup>11</sup> The novel of course takes its title from a famous poem by Goethe, but for Tournier, Nazism is not a malady which afflicts only Germans. Frenchmen can also find it attractive. A German interviewer characterised Tournier’s approach as follows: “Deutschland, das ist für Tournier ein immenses Stoffkonglomerat, ein in seinem Denken epidemisch gewordenes Ideenreservat. Hermeneutisch gesehen ist es das Fremde, durch das er immer wieder zum Eigenen gelangt.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, by engaging with German culture and history, Tournier also wrote about France. In a eulogy to Magris, Adolf Muschg used similar phrasing to characterise his colleague’s achievement, calling him someone who “das fremd gewordene Eigene im Anderen, zugleich das Andere im Eigenen finden will”.<sup>13</sup> *Danubio* (1986), a travelogue-cum-novel which follows the course of Europe’s longest river through territories which have been shaped by speakers of German, is an inherently transnational work, which Magris has called a Bildungsroman because of the lessons absorbed by its anonymous narrator.<sup>14</sup>

The Anglophone approach to Germany throughout much of this period arguably lacked a comparable degree of empathy, especially in its focus on the otherness of its object of study. Leading contemporary historians of Germany, such as Richard J. Evans, Ian Kershaw, and Christopher Clark, owe their reputations to works of political history either based in Nazism or with a direct bearing on it. Evans and Kershaw’s career-defining works are a Third Reich Trilogy and a biography of Hitler respectively.<sup>15</sup> Communicating expertise on the Nazis can seem to be a *déformation professionnelle* of the British Germanist. A brief survey of contributions with a German focus in the *London Review of Books*, for example, perhaps the UK’s most influential intellectual periodical (circulation 75000 in 2018), shows an overwhelming bias to the political and cultural history of the first half

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**10** See Johannes Hösl, „Italiens zorniger Germanist,“ *Neues Forum* 14 (1967): 643f.

**11** Published as *The Erl-King* (London: Collins, 1972) and *The Ogre*, transl. by Barbara Bray (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000).

**12** Martin R. Dear, “‘Lebenslängliches Gespräch mit Deutschland’. Ein Besuch bei Michel Tournier,“ *Schreibheft. Zeitschrift für Literatur*, 26 September 1985: 76–82, here: 77.

**13** “Der Argonaut. Laudatio auf Claudio Magris,“ *Sinn und Form* 53:3 (2001): 322–331.

**14** Claudio Magris, *Danube*, transl. by Patrick Creagh (London: Harvill, 1990).

**15** The following are all published by Penguin: Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, *The Third Reich in Power*, and *The Third Reich at War* (2003/2005/2008); Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (2013); and Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (2007).

of the twentieth century. The Cambridge historians Clark and Evans are the *LRB*'s go-to Germanists. 21 of Evans' 29 articles are on the world wars, including six with Hitler in the title (published between 1989–2019); for Clark, who succeeded Evans as Regius Professor of History at the University of Cambridge in 2014, the count is eight out of twelve (2009–2019). Both are Knights of the Realm, Evans since 2012 for services to scholarship, Clark since 2015 for services to Anglo-German relations. Michael Hofmann is the *LRB*'s most frequent non-Historian Germanist contributor but his special subject when it comes to Germany is writers or artists persecuted by the Nazis (1980–2019). In comparison, academic Germanists with a literary specialism barely feature in the journal's pages. Jeremy Adler has written for it only four times (2003–2017), twice on Nazi-related subjects, T. J. Reed and Ritchie Robertson, the two most recent holders of Oxford's Schwarz-Taylor Professorship in German, have contributed once each (on Thomas Mann and Georg Büchner respectively).<sup>16</sup>

Writers are less exclusive in their focus on the dictatorships than the historians and authors so far cited. Fictional Germanists are also more likely to be female and to demonstrate that empathy with their subject which recognises aspects of the self in the foreign and marks an encounter with the 'Other' as an opportunity for personal growth and self-discovery. The survey begins chronologically with Elizabeth von Arnim (1866–1941) and the eponymous heroine of her one-way epistolary novel, *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* (1907). Both author and heroine are literary and cultural comparatists. The Australian-born von Arnim is a prominent figure in pre-First World War Anglo-German cultural relations who became known for her autobiographical accounts of an Englishwoman's marriage to a Prussian aristocrat in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898) and *The Adventures of Elizabeth on Rügen* (1904). She also wrote *The Benefactress* (1901) about a fictional upper-class young Englishwoman's visit to Germany at the invitation of her uncle and *Princess Priscilla's Fortnight* (1905), which goes one step further being set in Germany amongst German characters without an English-speaking intermediary as narrative focaliser.<sup>17</sup> Von Arnim was part of a mini-wave of Anglo-German fiction cut short by the First World War which included novels such as *Maurice Guest* (1908) by the Australian Henry Handel Richardson (the male pseudonym of Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson), *Pointed Roofs* (1915), the first volume in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* sequence, and

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<sup>16</sup> The figures are taken from the *LRB*'s online Archive (<https://www.lrb.co.uk/archive>).

<sup>17</sup> I have identified only three other twentieth-century novels in English which qualify for this category: John Irving, *Setting Free the Bears* (1968); Walter Abish, *How German is it?* (1980) and Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Blue Flower* (1995).

*The Good Soldier* (1915) by Ford Madox Ford.<sup>18</sup> *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* uniquely includes a character who attempts to mediate between the two languages and cultures. It is also von Arnim's most radical work, aesthetically, in terms of its gender politics, and in the subtlety of its presentation of troubled Anglo-German relations. This could be why it appears to have been misunderstood in the critical literature. It was greeted by reviewers, who included Virginia Woolf, as a disappointment.<sup>19</sup> A recent critic skips over it in a couple of sentences in a thirty-page chapter devoted to her "German novels", calling it "a lively book where English and German sensibilities are set at playful epistolary odds".<sup>20</sup> Von Arnim conducted undercover research by exchanging her role as lady of a well-appointed country house with that of an au pair with a family in Jena where the novel would be set, abandoning her post only when she could no longer fight off advances made to her by her employers' grown-up son.

The fictional letters in *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* are written in faultless though perhaps deliberately stilted English by the Anglo-German Rose-Marie Schmidt to the Englishman Roger Anstruther. E. M. Forster was at one point supposed to write the replies.<sup>21</sup> Mr Anstruther was lodging with Fräulein Schmidt's family while studying "Goethe and the minor German prophets" with her father and Professor Martens at Jena University.<sup>22</sup> The first phase of their correspondence ends abruptly after he tells her he is to marry a wealthy heiress at the instigation of his father. Marriage is about money; the British have more of it and expect moreover that brides are financed with a dowry. When the letters resume some three months later, the correspondence is placed on a different footing, at first formal and reserved, but slowly developing into a staged exercise in creative writing in which she relays views on a variety of topics, such as the English and German poets, music, religion, marriage and women's place in the world. The correspondence ends for good fifteen months after it began, by which time Fräulein Schmidt is on the point of becoming a published albeit invisible author as the English translator of her father's book about Goethe in Jena. As a female

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**18** See my "Anglo-German Dilemmas in *The Good Soldier*, or Europe on the Brink in 1913", *International Ford Madox Ford Studies* 14 (2015), special centenary issue on *The Good Soldier* ed. by Max Saunders: 223–240.

**19** Isobel Maddison, *Elizabeth von Arnim: Beyond the German Garden* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 29f.

**20** Maddison, *Elizabeth von Arnim*, p.50. See also Stefanie Hölzer, "'Zu jener Zeit hatten wir noch nichts gegen die Deutschen'. Über Elisabeth von Arnim", *Merkur* 59:5 (2005): 436–441.

**21** Kirsten Jüngley and Brigitte Roßbeck, *Elisabeth von Arnim. Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1996), p. 138.

**22** Elizabeth von Arnim, *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* (London: Vintage, 2017), p. 67.

writer of her time she types up male text, then re-writes and edits it in translation. The original version of her father's book was turned down by each German publisher he approached; only once it has been trans-adapted by his daughter in her mother's language is it finally accepted abroad. The novel's minor narrative arc closes when Rose-Marie finds a publisher. Its major narrative arc traces her refusal to accept Roger's renewed proposal, which can be read in Anglo-German terms.

The whole novel is moulded around a framework of Anglo-German relations which are mediated by the author of the letters. She and other characters are forever comparing the ways of the one country with those of the other and between them posit a series of dichotomies. The Germans are on the side of culture, the English of commerce, the Germans have ancestors, the upstart English have money, the Germans have music, the English have literature, even poetry, which it is bizarre for the Germans to lack but somehow even Goethe is not deemed a great poet. Mr Anstruther declared Goethe's poetry to be "coarse, obvious, and commonplace".<sup>23</sup> Fräulein Schmidt alludes to both *Faust* and to *Elective Affinities* but the wider intertextual relationship of the novel is with *The Sufferings of Young Werther*. The next lodger, the immensely rich Mr Joey Collins, pronounces Goethe's name "as though it rhymed with dirty"<sup>24</sup> and assumes the posture of an imperialist abroad who shouts louder in his native language when he wants to be understood by the locals. But he falls for the Schmidts' neighbour, Fräulein von Lindeberg, whom he inappropriately calls 'Vicki' when asking advice on a Christmas present for her:

"Vicki?" responds Fräulein Schmidt.

He had the grace to blush. "Well, Fräulein What's her name. You can't expect anyone decent to get the hang of these names of yours. They ain't got any hang, so how's one to get it? What'd she like for Christmas? Don't you all kick up a mighty fuss over Christmas? Trees and presents and that? Plummier plum pudding than we have, and mincier mince pies; what?"

"If you think you will get even one plum-pudding or mince-pie", said I [...] "you are gravely mistaken. The national dish is carp boiled in beer" [...].<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to Mr Anstruther and Fräulein Schmidt, Mr Collins and Fräulein von Lindeberg do get married, an alliance of intercultural insouciance (in the shape of Joey) and material opportunism (in the shape of the down-at-heel von Lindebergs), who between them stand for the worst in both countries. The novel,

<sup>23</sup> Arnim, *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Arnim, *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, p. 98.

<sup>25</sup> Arnim, *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, p. 266.

published seven years before the outbreak of the First World War, is an allegory of the breakdown of relations between the two countries; the interaction, while often comic, is neither happy nor based on mutual respect. The novel's chief cultural intermediary is an Anglo-German brought up in Germany, the author a British German resident who has felt her way into the mind of her narrator.

Christopher Isherwood (1904-1986) went to Berlin in 1930 to work for Kurt Hirschfeld's Institut für Sexualforschung. As a writer he is an extremely influential mediator of Anglo-German relations, but his autobiographically-marked narrator in his two Berlin novels is a rather different case. Isherwood was conscientious with his German lessons because he wanted to talk to his sexual partners, preferring young German working-class men. In his memoir *Christopher and his Kind* (1976) he makes himself sound like a sex tourist. But he also quotes his friend Stephen Spender who reports:

In the early stages of our friendship, I was drawn to him by the adventurousness of his life. His renunciation of England, his poverty, his friendship, his independence, his work, all struck me as heroic. During months in the winter of 1930, when I went back to England, I corresponded with him in the spirit of writing letters to a Polar explorer.<sup>26</sup>

The polar explorer returns to England shortly after the *Machtergreifung* and writes English versions of Berlin 'Krisenromane', *Mr Norris changes Trains* (1935) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), probably benefitting from reading the English translations of two recent German novels about the economic crisis which were also set in Berlin, Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* and Erich Kästner's *Fabian*.<sup>27</sup> A play by John van Druten *I am a camera* followed (1951), which was made into a film (1955, dir. Henry Cornelius), and then a musical which in turn became one of the most famous Germany films of all times, *Cabaret* (1973, dir. Bob Fosse).<sup>28</sup> Presenting himself metaphorically as a camera, the male central figure, who appears under a variety of names (William Bradshaw, Christopher Isherwood, Brian Roberts), observes without participating, an outsider flâneur

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and his Kind. 1929–1939* (London: Magnum, 1978), p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> Erich Kästner, *Fabian. The Story of a Moralist*, transl. by Cyrus Brooks (London: Cape, 1932); Irmgard Keun, *The Artificial Silk Girl*, transl. by Basil Creighton (London: Chatto and Windus, 1933). See also Yvonne Holbeche, "Goodbye to Berlin: Erich Kästner and Christopher Isherwood," *Journal of the Australian Universities Language and Literature Association* 94 (2000): 35–54; and Gisela Argyle, "Loving Weimar Berlin with a Smile and Angst: Irmgard Keun and Christopher Isherwood," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 35:4 (2008): 277–293.

<sup>28</sup> For a full history of the adaptations, see Stephen Tropiano, *Cabaret* (London: Eurospan, 2011).



rather than a participating linguist ethnographer in the mould of Rose-Marie Schmidt. In *Cabaret*, now a doctoral student (we are to assume with a German theme), Brian Roberts is prepared to intervene politically, for which foolish heroism he is beaten up by the SA. In the novels, he says remarkably little about himself. In *Mr Norris Changes Trains* we know that he earns his living teaching English and translating but not why he went to Berlin in the first place; in *Goodbye to Berlin*, still teaching but no longer translating, he explains to a pupil who feigns interests why he is in Germany:

“The political and economic situation,” I improvised authoritatively, in my schoolmaster voice, “is more interesting in Germany than in any other European country”.

“Except Russia, of course”, I added experimentally.<sup>29</sup>

Isherwood was obliged to be coy about his own motives in his autobiographically inspired prose. He transfers his sexual promiscuity with men to the fictional character Sally Bowles whose turnover in the bedroom is stupendous.

Forms of cultural exchange are at the heart of *Mr Norris Changes Trains*. Mr Norris himself is a spy, an Englishman in the pay of the French for reports on German communists. Writing about Germany for the British and explaining Britain to the Germans remains a female preserve, however. Germany correspondent Helen Pratt resembles a character from Evelyn Waugh’s *Scoop* (except that *Scoop* was published three years later), becoming ever more excited about the non-stop news which the German political crisis generates. At the end of the novel we read that: “She exuded vitality, success, and news. The Nazi Revolution had positively given her a new lease of life.”<sup>30</sup> In *Goodbye to Berlin*, Sally Bowles takes on this mediating role but is cynically disingenuous where Pratt was opportunistic. One of Sally’s distinguishing characteristics is her anglicised German, which Isherwood deploys for comic effect: “‘Frau Karpf, Leibling, willst Du sein ein Engel und bring zwei Tassen von Kaffee?’ Sally’s German was not merely incorrect; it was all her own. She pronounced every word in a mincing, specially ‘foreign’ manner.”<sup>31</sup> At one point she also enlists Christopher to write an article which she has promised a German contact who is starting a magazine. She explains: Weach number is going to take a special country and kind of review it, with articles about the manners and customs, and all that ... Well the first country they are going to do is England and they want me to write an article on the English Girl ...”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (St Albans: Panther, 1977), p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (London: Penguin, 1935), p. 188

<sup>31</sup> Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*, p. 35.

<sup>32</sup> Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*, p. 67f.

She cannot deliver the content herself which is why she farms out the commission. Dissatisfied with Christopher's effort, she phones another man who she claims works in cinema and who she is confident will dictate a printable text while shaving. Helen Pratt and Sally Bowles thus present two examples of reporting as bad faith, either on Germany for the British or about Britain for the Germans, which is surely a further symptom of the looming conflict. Can we not take these two characters as self-critical ciphers for Isherwood, the Anglo-German intermediary who made his literary name from these entertaining fictional accounts of a land in crisis? The American-Jewish narrator of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (1973) represents a reverse post-war case of reporting in bad faith. After accompanying her second husband on a three-year military posting to Germany in the late 1960s, she accepts an invitation to contribute a column to *Heidelberg Alt und Neu* to be published in parallel translation. At first she writes about anodyne subjects, then she turns her attention to how memories of the Third Reich are suppressed, recalling: "I started out being clever and superficial and dishonest. Gradually I got braver."<sup>33</sup>

The Germanist's switch in sex takes place after the war. From now on in Anglophone film and fiction, cultural mediation between the English- and German-speaking worlds tends to be men's work. The idea of Germany, East or West, being a place of otherness, spiced with danger and excitement, takes hold. For John Irving the same held true of Austria, especially in his early trio of Vienna-themed novels. The American Germanist characters in his fiction tend to be language instructors, such as PhD-student Fred 'Bogus' Trumper in *The Water-Method Man* (1972) and associate professor Severin Winter in *The 158-Pound Marriage* (1974). Bizarre or nonsensical academic topics are part of the stock in trade for comic campus novels and so it is in Irving's university-based fiction: the anonymous narrator of *The 158-Pound Marriage* has written a PhD on "The Application of Bergsonian Time to Clerical Fascism in Austria", while Fred Trumper is preparing a translation with "etymological dictionary" of the "Old Low Norse" ballad, *Akthelt and Gunnel*. He finds himself making up half the meanings, just as Irving has made up the whole idea of "Old Low Norse": "Since no one knew anything about Old Low Norse, I could make things up. I made up a lot of origins. This made the translation of Akthelt and Gunnel easier too. I started making up a lot of words. It's very hard to tell real Old Low Norse from made-up Old Low Norse."<sup>34</sup> Trumper has earned his nickname "Bogus" for other exploits. Irving is not so

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<sup>33</sup> Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1974), p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> John Irving, *The Water-Method Man* (London: Black Swan, 1980), Kindle Edition, p.15.

much concerned with fake scholarship in German Studies as Austrian bad faith in avoiding the Nazi past.<sup>35</sup>

German provided John Le Carré with a refuge during his adolescence, an alternative to everyday reality which constrained him, a different world which his fellow pupils and the other members of his family could not share with him. The experience shaped him:

The legacy of that early immersion in things German is now pretty clear to me. It gave me my own patch of eclectic territory, it fed my incurable romanticism and my love of lyricism [...] And when I came to study the dramas of Goethe, Lenz, Schiller, Kleist and Büchner, I discovered that I related equally to their classic austerity, and to their neurotic excesses. The trick, it seemed to me, was to disguise the one with the other.<sup>36</sup>

In other words, the muse has a double identity and ability to combine opposites. Like the Germanist characters in his fiction, Le Carré can only see a reflection of himself when he studies German literature. This is not an intercultural encounter which enriches its subject through exchange because it confirms what he already knew or felt. George Smiley, Le Carré's most famous character, subscribes to *German Life and Letters* and reads Grimmelshausen and the baroque poets in his free time. Like Le Carré, he has 'a lifelong, unreconciled relationship with the German muse', which for the novelist himself took on the role of 'substitute mother'.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to other linguists in his fiction, Le Carré's Germanists do not have family connections with the countries where their language is spoken. With the exception of Smiley, however, they tend to be unstable individuals, marked by their troubled childhoods and distant parents, making them susceptible to overtures from foreign intelligence services. The two double agents, Magnus Pym in *A Perfect Spy* (1986) and Ted Mundy in *Absolute Friends* (2003), both fit this pattern and follow similar academic paths to Le Carré himself. Bilingualism and the concomitant double loyalties exert a high price. *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1973) presents a typology of attitudes to language, language learning and the application of linguistic knowledge, which is acquired through education or background or a combination of the two. Smiley's decision at the beginning of that novel not to sell his treasured edition of Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* is a signal of his professional rejuvenation.

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<sup>35</sup> See Benedict Schofield, "Austria's Ambiguous Smile: Transnational Perspectives on Austrian Belatedness in the Fiction of John Irving," in *New Perspectives on Contemporary Austrian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Katya Krylova (Oxford: Lang, 2018), pp. 65–92.

<sup>36</sup> John Le Carré, *In the Pigeon Tunnel. Stories from my Life* (London: Penguin, 2016), p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Le Carré, *In the Pigeon Tunnel*, p. 3.

In Le Carré's world, you cannot trust an Englishman who knows German. Magnus Pym and Ted Mundy share an emotional bond to the country which is forged by erotic experiences in their youth. They also still revere their German teachers, both of whom were Jewish émigrés. Pym's Lippsie is at the same time his father's mistress who is responsible for his own sexual initiation, at least in one version of his memory. She tragically takes her own life, the reader assumes on account of her experiences in Nazi Germany and the fates of those family members she left behind. Pym's relationship with German is thus dysfunctional and traumatic, loaded with sex, guilt and secrets. As an agent he makes his treasured edition of *Simplicissimus* into his code book, thus endowing an item which is most precious to him with danger. The book was presented ceremoniously to him by his mentor from the Sudetenland Axel while on what amounts to a gap year in Bern. Under Axel's guidance he reads his way through modern German literature and is even introduced to Thomas Mann. He then returns home to study. Nobody can make studying German sound more expressive of personality and bound up with life than Le Carré:

He threw himself afresh upon the German muse and scarcely faltered when he discovered that at Oxford she was about five hundred years older than she had been in Bern, and that anything written within living memory was unsound. But he quickly overcame his disappointment. This is quality, he reasoned. This is academia. In no time he was immersing himself in the garbled texts of medieval minstrels with the same energy that, in an earlier life, he had bestowed on Thomas Mann. By the end of his first term he was an enthusiastic student of Middle and Old High German, by the end of his second could recite the Hildebrandslied and intone Bishop Ulfila's Gothic translation of the Bible in his college bar to the delight of his modest court. By the middle of his third he was romping in the Parnassian fields of comparative and putative philology, where youthful creativity has ever had its fling. And when he found himself briefly transported into the perilous modernisms of the seventeenth century, he was pleased to be able to report, in a twenty-page assault on the upstart Grimmelshausen, that the poet had marred his work with popular moralising and undermined his validity by fighting on both sides in the Thirty Years War. As a final swipe he suggested that Grimmelshausen's obsession with false names cast doubt upon his authorship.<sup>38</sup>

The important thing about the syllabus after its cultural prestige is its age and difference, but Mundy uses it as a vehicle for career progression rather than education.

*Absolute Friends* begins in a late-1960s West-Berlin underworld of communes and squats which, as it spawned outlaw groupings like the Red Army Faction in the following decade, was easily romanticised in neighbouring countries. In the

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38 John Le Carré, *A Perfect Spy* (London: Sceptre, 2011), p. 375.

spoof campus novel *The Baader-Meinhof Affair* (2002), Erin Cosgrove parodies the ways students of German at an East Coast college venerate enemies of the German state as chic. Jillian Becker popularised the connection between this version of radical extremism and the Nazis in a racy journalistic work, *Hitler's Children: The Story of the Baader-Meinhof Terrorist Gang* (1977).<sup>39</sup> This excitingly written but one-sided commissioned account is Becker's only book on a German subject. More serious cultural intermediaries such as Sylvère Lothringer, editor of *Semiotexte(e). The German Issue* (1982), encouraged the idea that divided Berlin half a life-time after the end of Nazism was a crucible for the avant-garde, projecting an aura on to its "squatters, punks, artists and radicals, theorists and ex-terrorists".<sup>40</sup> Lothringer was an academic specialist in French Studies who is open about his lack of German and intention of seeing the city where he lives and works, New York, reflected back by Berlin. According to the publishers' blurb to the second edition, *Semiotexte(e). The German Issue* became "an investigation of two outlaw cities [...], which embodied all the tensions and contradictions of the world at the time".<sup>41</sup> In *Aliens and Anexoria* (2000), his collaborator and ex-partner Chris Kraus depicts Ulrike Meinhof as an avant-garde figure and lists Jillian Becker and a French translation of Meinhof's writings in her bibliography. Kraus provides a metaphor for their working method in the autofictional novel *Torpor* (2006), in which the couple drive from Berlin to Romania shortly after the end of Communism to find a child for adoption in ignorance of Romanian laws. Kraus and Lothringer are accomplished writers, translators and editors, but when it comes to their transmission of German themes, their methodology has traces of Delillo's fictional founder of Hitler Studies, Jack Gladney in *White Noise*.

Le Carré's Germanists face personal and ethical choices which are determined essentially by there being two German republics giving them two ideological systems to choose from. The Germany which they encounter is thus either a literary construction (a hangover from their degree days) or an abstraction (in the sense of a fundamental choice of loyalties). It is a foreign place, which both embodies their insecurities while being invested with their hopes and providing a backcloth against which they play out a grand drama. What makes them stand out in the history sketched out in this article is that they are not Anglo-German intermediaries. Post-2016 Le Carré needed a new model. In *Legacy of Spies* (2017)

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<sup>39</sup> Originally published the same year as the German Autumn (New York/London: Lippincott/Michael Joseph, 1977), *Hitler's Children* remains in print and has been translated into more than half a dozen languages.

<sup>40</sup> Publisher's website: <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/german-issue-new-edition>, accessed 24 August 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Publisher's website.

George Smiley is no longer a British patriot but a European by conviction. His German expertise now goes unmentioned.

The Hollywood film director Quentin Tarantino (b. 1963), who made his name with stylish but violent action movies, might seem an unlikely inclusion in a study of fictional German scholars, but his *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) and *Django Unchained* (2012) depict one apiece. The first film is set mainly in Nazi-occupied France in the summer of 1944 and tells the story of a fictitious resistance group led by American commandos who succeed in blowing up Hitler and his whole leadership team in a Paris cinema. The British agent Archie Hicox, played by the Irish-German bilingual actor Michael Fassbender, is parachuted into France where he must pass as an officer in the Wehrmacht. The prototype for the linguist as spy on German territory in war time is Richard Hannay in John Buchan's *Greenmantle* (1916) who, en route to Constantinople, must first pretend to speak only Afrikaans and English, then, after switching identities, to pass as a German. He succeeds effortlessly in both guises, even the Kaiser to whom he is introduced of his German credentials.

Hicox's commanding officer explains that "Operation Kino" "requires knowledge of the German film industry under the Third Reich".<sup>42</sup> Hicox is the author of two books on German cinema and speaks German fluently, like a "Katzenjammer kid", as he himself boasts – except these cartoon characters, originally inspired by Max and Moritz, had nothing to do with the German language apart from being called Hans and Fritz. Hicox's first book is entitled *Art of the Eyes, the Heart and the Mind: A Study of German Cinema in the 20's* and his second *24-Frame Da Vinci*, which he describes to none other than Winston Churchill as a "sub-textual film criticism study of the work of German director G. W. Pabst".<sup>43</sup> That the first English-language monograph on this Austrian film director was not published until 1977 is one of the least important inaccuracies in Tarantino's fast-paced war film.<sup>44</sup> Once in enemy territory, an attentive German officer hears that Hicox has a strange accent, then he gives himself completely away by indicating the number three with a British rather than German gesture. The most linguistically talented character in the film is the SS officer Hans Landa played by Christoph Waltz, the least proficient are the Americans, who are unable to speak any language except their own. Tarantino has seen too many war films in which the language question is elided and offers a correction. Is he making a wider point about cultural intermediaries in Anglo-German relations? When challenged about his

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<sup>42</sup> *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), dir. Quentin Tarrantino.

<sup>43</sup> *Inglourious Basterds*, dir. Tarrantino.

<sup>44</sup> Lee Atwell, *G. W. Pabst* (Boston: Twayne, 1977).

place of origin, Hicox claims that he was born near the mountain of Piz Palü where everyone speaks as he does. The real Piz Palü is in the Swiss canton of Graubünden, where Swiss German, Italian and Romansh are all spoken. Natives of the region are likely to sound foreign when they speak High German, or so Hicox implies. But he has taken his cover story from the 1929 ‘mountain film’ co-directed by Pabst, *Die weiße Hölle vom Piz Palü*. In any discussion of that or any other Pabst film, Hicox could no doubt more than hold his own, but he cannot make his academic expertise count in this real-world, life or death situation, which is a turning point in the film.

Tarantino’s more challenging Germanist, however, who makes no attempt to disguise his background, appears in the follow-up film, *Django Unchained*, which is set towards the end of the era of slavery in the American South. The national roles are reversed with comparison to *Inglorious Basterds*: now it is the American slave owners who are fascists and the solitary German who stands for the values of reason embodied by the law, freedom, and respect (among the white characters at least). Christoph Waltz, who played the SS officer and Jew Hunter in *Inglorious Basterds*, is now an eccentric ‘good German’.<sup>45</sup> His Dr King Schultz mediates German culture to the Americans, explaining, for example, the “legend of Siegfried and Brünhilde” to the ex-slave Django. Django takes on the role of Siegfried, thus in turn wresting the legend from Aryan supremacists, who liberates his wife, the German-speaking Broomhilda von Shaft, a slave who was brought up by a German family. Schultz is loosely based on a historical figure Carl Schurz (1829–1906) who emigrated to the United States via London after fighting on the losing side in the 1848 revolution.<sup>46</sup> At the climax of the film, Schultz stops a harpist playing a melody by Beethoven because he cannot bear to hear music composed in the spirit of emancipation be co-opted by forces of barbarism. There are multiple links between the two films. Schultz and Broomhilda speak German to each other when they first meet so that possible eavesdroppers will not understand. Django and Broomhilda have to pass, not as Germans, but as strangers, which test they fail, just as Hicox failed his German language test. But German is now the language of the oppressed and of human values. Robert von Dassanowsky describes the relationship between the films as part of “a Tarantinian dialectic that moves between the German-speaking world and the United States in the

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<sup>45</sup> Up to a point, ‘good Germans’ have been Hollywood stock characters. See Pól o Dochartaigh and Christiane Schönfeld (eds.), *Representing the “Good German” in Literature and Culture after 1945: Altruism and Moral Ambiguity* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> According to Robert von Dassanowsky, “Dr. ‘King’ Schultz as Ideologue and Emblem: Germany, France and the United States,” in *Django Unchained: The Continuation of Meta-Cinema*, ed. by Oliver. C. Speck (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 17–37, here p. 19.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries” and addresses “the collisions of humanism and Social Darwinism as they reverberate from post-Napoleonic Europe to pre-Civil War America, and eventually (back) to Fascist Europe”.<sup>47</sup> Like both Le Carré and Garton Ash, though more emphatically than either of them, Tarantino has seen the need for a new paradigm and places a mediator between the two cultures, in this case American and German, at the centre of this American-German film.

Other writers have recently offered further new paradigms. The American novelist Jonathan Franzen (b. 1959) reveals his past as a student of German in a chapter of a memoir he published in his mid-forties, “The Foreign Language”.<sup>48</sup> Franzen attended Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania where he was schooled in German Modernism. Like Le Carré, he wants his readers to know the degree syllabus, in his case because his reading shaped his emerging personality and helped him understand his frustrated sexuality. Franzen’s first experience of the language aged ten is also his first encounter with a sexual female presence in the shape of a nineteen-year old Viennese lodger. He remembered no German afterwards and did not understand the effect which his young teacher was having on him. The books which Franzen remembers most are all about young men trying to make their way in an alienating world. After reading Goethe’s *Faust* I and II and Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, he helps a female student majoring in French, whom he wants to seduce, with her paper on *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. He reads a string of other modern classics, *Der Process*, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, *Der Zauberberg*, some Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal, a novel by Robert Walser, and *The Chinese Wall* by Karl Kraus, who would exert the greatest influence on him. Franzen had a flawed but brilliant teacher in Mr Avery whose “yellowed, disintegrating copies of German prose masterworks were like missionary Bibles”.<sup>49</sup> Avery believes that the purpose of literature is to tell us about life and upbraids Franzen at one point for not paying as much attention to Kafka as he had to Rilke:

“But Kafka’s about your life!” Avery said. “Not to take anything away from your admiration of Rilke, but I’ll tell you right now, Kafka’s a lot more about your life than Rilke is. Kafka was like us. All of these writers, they were human beings trying to make sense of their lives. But Kafka above all! Kafka was afraid of death, he had problems with sex, he had problems

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47 Dassanowsky, “Dr. ‘King’ Schultz as Ideologue and Emblem,” pp. 17f.

48 Jonathan Franzen, *The Discomfort Zone. A Personal History* (London: Fourth Estate, 2006), pp. 117–56.

49 Franzen, *The Discomfort Zone*, p. 134.



with women, he had problems with his job, he had problems with his parents. And he is writing to try to figure these things out, *that's* what this book is about."<sup>50</sup>

"The Foreign Language" is as much about his struggle to have sex as it is about learning German. He could have had all these experiences through exposure to another foreign language, but he had them with German and nobody mentions Nazis or Baader-Meinhof.

Franzen's academic interest in German Studies resulted subsequently in his kind-of novel *The Kraus Project* (2013), consisting of two essays by Karl Kraus in parallel translation and footnotes co-authored by the Austrian novelist Daniel Kehlmann and the American academic Paul Reitter which explain the material and embed Franzen's encounter with Kraus in his own autobiography. Franzen began the translations of *Heine und die Folgen* and *Nestroy und die Nachwelt* as a Fulbright scholar in West Berlin in the early 1980s, though his real interest at this time was to write his first novel.<sup>51</sup> The book not only explains Kraus, it illuminates contemporary American politics and the internet revolution in the immediate pre-Trump era through comparison with 'the culture wars' in turn-of-the-century Austria-Hungary.<sup>52</sup> This is an example of creative and empathetic German Studies which bears comparison with the practice of Magris and Tournier.

A. S. Byatt (b.1936) chronicles multiple entanglements with Germany and Germans amongst the off-spring of a network of English artistic and Fabian families in *The Children's Book*. The First World War provides the end-point for a narrative which begins in the mid-1890s and can be read alongside von Arnim's *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*. Cultural intermediaries between the two countries are once again empathetic. *The Children's Book* is a novel of ideas, which Byatt recognises as a European rather than a British genre and for which she made full use of her schoolgirl German.<sup>53</sup> The principal Germanist character is once again female. Her German mother settled in Britain when she married and her older brother, usually referred to in the narrative as 'Karl/Charles', travels to and from London and Munich. Griselda Wellwood fulfils her childhood dream of

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<sup>50</sup> Franzen, *The Discomfort Zone*, p. 139f.

<sup>51</sup> Germanist writers draw on each other's work. Franzen notes the presence of Timothy Garton Ash in Berlin at the same time and also cites John Irving as a literary model he hopes to surpass. Irving had meanwhile drawn on Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915) in *The 158-Pound Marriage* (1974). Jonathan Franzen, *The Kraus Project* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013), p. 254 (for Garton Ash) and pp. 174, 177, and p. 187 (for Irving).

<sup>52</sup> See Thomas O. Barbee, "Can Karl Kraus 'Live Away' from Austria? Jonathan Franzen's *The Kraus Project*," *German Studies Review* 42:1 (2019): 103–121.

<sup>53</sup> *English and German Cultural Encounters. A. S. Byatt in Conversation with Martin Swales and Godela Weiss-Sussex. 2015 Bithell Memorial Lecture* (London: IMLR, 2016).

taking a degree in German and French, as one of the pioneering cohort of women undergraduates at Cambridge, where she also stays on to do research. Her topic expresses the novel's ethic of the interconnectedness of cultures. She explains:

I should like to study German fairytales. They've been much studied already – as examples of an old Germanic religion, the life of the Volk, going back to Aryan sources, all that. But that isn't what interests me. It's really all the ways in which fairytales aren't myths that interests me. The way there are so very many versions – hundreds – of the same tale – Cinderella, say, or Catskin – and they are all the same and all different.<sup>54</sup>

When shortly afterwards she attends the London premiere of Wagner's Ring Cycle, Griselda points out where Wagner's nationalist interpretation diverges from the source material. Cultures across Europe, in Britain or Germany, "are all the same and all different",<sup>55</sup> according to her analysis.

*Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* and *The Children's Book*, although written more than one hundred years apart from each other, focus on the fragility of the connections between Britain and Germany in the Edwardian decade. Byatt's historical novel, looking both back to the period which ended with the First World War and more hopefully forward to a different future at the beginning of the twenty-first century when it was written, is the more upbeat of the two, however.

Two recent successful accounts of German history illustrate two contrasting paradigms vividly. James Hawes' *The Shortest History of Germany* (2017) argues that there have always been two sides to Europe's largest country. One looks to the west, is essentially liberal and inclines to peaceable co-existence with its neighbours. It was civilised originally by the Romans and more recently parts of it were incorporated into France by Napoleon. The other side looks east, was originally settled by conquest, and inclines to authoritarianism and intolerance. In the last century it brought the world first Nazism, then for forty years sustained the GDR. Hawes writes with swagger and wit and backs up his thesis with maps, statistics and pie charts. Published a year after Brexit and two years after the Migrant Crisis in Germany, he invites his readers to wonder which Germany will win out in the twenty-first century, that represented by Angela Merkel or that which votes for the AFD. Hawes' narrative is undeniably exciting but he takes his readers back to the age of Le Carré when German history was an ideological adventure playground. Published three years earlier to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Neil MacGregor's *Germany: Memories of a Nation* has a very different scope. Organised around themes, often represented by objects, in-

<sup>54</sup> A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2009), p. 488.

<sup>55</sup> Byatt, *The Children's Book*, p. 488.

stitutions or artworks, what Pierre Nora has termed *lieux de mémoire*, its anti-telological bias enables MacGregor to negotiate Nazism in ways designed to challenge his readers' preconceptions. The book is collaborative to the extent that he marshals expert witnesses from various branches of German Studies whom he quotes verbatim rather than from published secondary sources. Above all, he compares German history with that of other countries – France, the United States, and especially Britain. He shows when the national histories overlap, for example, during the Tudor epoch when the Hanseatic League maintained a significant presence in London, for which episode his expert witness is the historical novelist Hilary Mantel. In MacGregor's eyes, if Germany is different it is not because of the ways its history developed in a uniquely catastrophic direction but because of how Germans now look back on their past. The book begins by contrasting three triumphal arches in the centre of Paris, London and Munich and showing how unlike the Arc de Triomphe in Paris and London's Marble Arch, the Siegestor in Munich commemorates both the victories of the Bavarian army and the misuses to which nationalist history was put by the Nazis.<sup>56</sup>

Fiction can open up further imaginative spaces to reconfigure British or Anglo-American views on Germany which both widen the focus from war and Nazism and entail self-critique. An intriguing recent novel by Deborah Levy, *The Man who Saw Everything* (2019), is the most recent example. The central figure called Saul Adler is an historian of Communist Eastern Europe who visits East Germany in the autumn of 1988 to research his PhD on the psychology of tyrants. Even though he speaks fluent German as the son of a Jewish émigré, he is assigned a translator, the multilingual Walter Müller, with whom he forms a roman-

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<sup>56</sup> Neil MacGregor, *Germany: Memories of a Nation* (London: Penguin, 2016), pp. viii–xii. See also James Hawes, *The Shortest History of Germany* (London: Old Street Publishing, 2017). Various recent publications suggest that the equation of Germany with its recent past is no longer as current as it once was. With Schubert's *Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession* (2015), the singer and German scholar Ian Bostridge demonstrates that music can provide a gateway to German cultural history, which is subtly different from our own. Uwe Schütte in *Kraftwerk: Future Music from Germany* (London: Penguin, 2020) explains how a cult pop band reconnected with the Weimar avant-garde which the Nazis ended. There were two landmark translations in 2018 and 2019: Uwe Johnson's *Jahrestage* is finally available in its entirety in English: *Anniversaries*, transl. by Damion Searls (New York: NYRB Books, 2018); a revised translation of Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* was brought out as a Penguin Classic, transl. by Philip Boehm (London: Penguin, 2019). The translator Adrian Nathan West has also got away from Nazi themes with versions of Jean Amery's *Charles Bovary Landarzt: Porträt eines einfachen Mannes* und Rainald Goetz's *Irre*, texts which waited thirty and forty years to be translated into English: *Insane* (London, Fitzcarrald, 2017); Jean Amery, *Charles Bovary, Country Doctor. Portrait of a Simple Man* (New York: NYRB Books, 2018).

tic attachment. The novel is arranged around various dates and events. The ‘Reichskristallnacht’ in 1938 is ever on his mind as that is when his mother came to the UK when she was eight and he wears a pearl necklace she left him when she was run over and killed when he himself was twelve. 1969 is present in the novel because on 8 August that year the four members of the Beatles were photographed on the zebra crossing in Abbey Road where Saul himself is twice run over after having his photograph taken, the first time in 1988 just before his research visit to East Germany and the second time in 2016, 1988 and 2016 are mixed up in Saul’s mind as he lies dying after his second accident. A character who had been a Stasi informer in 1988 appears to him as a doctor and explains the historical moment: “Germany East and West are together. The year is 2016. The month is June, the twenty-fourth. Yesterday Britain voted to leave the European Union.”<sup>57</sup> The novel has a web of references to successful and unsuccessful crossings, tying things together or untying them. The Englishman Saul’s own life has become well and truly unstuck when he is run over for the second time and he lies facing a jumble of memories. The German Walter Müller is the superior cultural intermediary, able to connect with speakers of all the East European languages Saul needs for his research project. In 1988 the differences between the UK and the GDR are more to do with politics than national character; in 2016 the problems lie within the British character rather than in relations between the British and the Germans.

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57 Deborah Levy, *The Man who Saw Everything* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019), p. 105.