FROM HALLSTEIN TO SINATRA: CULTURAL REFLECTIONS OF POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO GERMANYs, 1965–85

The attempts of Konrad Adenauer’s governments to isolate the GDR internationally persisted in the shape of the Hallstein doctrine until 1967. According to this policy, promulgated from 1955, the Federal Republic would reduce or sever diplomatic ties with any government (apart from the Soviet Union) which recognized the GDR as a sovereign state. But during Ludwig Erhard’s weak premiership from 1963 to 1966, the economic and political peril of disrupting otherwise cordial relations with countries which chose to concede the existence of two German states was becoming apparent, and the Hallstein doctrine was proving decidedly counterproductive. Nevertheless, it lingered as the political symbol of an impotence in the face of division which was reflected in the cultural life of the two German states. Not until 1967, when the ‘Große Koalition’ introduced a change of direction in the form of a ‘neue Ostpolitik’ was the Hallstein doctrine gradually abandoned. Twenty years later the ‘Sinatra doctrine’ enunciated by Gennady Gerasimov, Mikhail Gorbatchev’s spokesman, was heralding the imminent revolutions in Germany and elsewhere. ‘Let them do it their way’ was the new attitude of the Soviet Union to its former satellite states. The Sinatra doctrine succeeded in bringing about the demise of the GDR where Adenauer’s Hallstein doctrine had failed. But despite the dramatic (though peaceful) East German revolution of November 1989, the enormous changes wrought in the political relationship between the two Germanies were in part the result of a gradual process, by way of Willy Brandt’s ‘Ostpolitik’. On becoming Chancellor in 1969, freed from the constraints of coalitions with the CDU-CSU, Willy Brandt was able to bring about a working relationship with the GDR, including, in the form of the Grundlagenvertrag of 1972, de facto recognition of the existence of two sovereign states on German soil. The SPD-FDP coalition’s subsequent efforts to establish friendly (and mutually profitable) inner-German relations were continued against all expectations by the incoming CDU-CSU coalition after 1982. Indeed, by 1984 Helmut Kohl’s government had arranged loans of almost DM 2 billion for the GDR, arrangements in which Franz-Josef Strauss, conservative even by the standards of the CDU-CSU, was personally involved. In September 1987, Helmut Kohl, a CDU Chancellor, had so far abandoned the legacy of Adenauer that he was prepared to receive Erich Honecker in the Federal Republic as a foreign head of state.

This evolution in inner-German relations is reflected in the literature of the period; for as the political circumstances change, so too does the aesthetic approach. Not only are the changes reflected, but, as I hope to show in this article, they are in some cases actually divined in advance: that is to say, the root causes of improved political relations are detected before their historical effects are fully apparent. Far from being programmatic, the literature of the period may thus best be described as seismographic. Three authors from three generations stand out in this respect: Uwe Johnson, eleven years old when the war ended, Peter Schneider, born in 1940, and Thorsten Becker, whose birth in 1958 came at a time when the division of Germany was firmly established.

In 1985 Thorsten Becker published his first novel, Die Bürgschaft. It may be a coincidence that he chose the East German provincial town Anklam on the Peene as the setting for the first of many sub-stories in this book, Anklam being the town where Uwe Johnson spent the first ten years of his life. But it can hardly be denied that Johnson’s work on the divided Germany of the 1960s remains as a ghostly presence behind Die Bürgschaft, and, indeed, behind Peter Schneider’s Der Mauerspringer (1982). In the 1960s Uwe Johnson became the first German author of stature to tackle the question of the two Germanies, and he perhaps more than any other was acutely aware of the aesthetic problems which such an undertaking can engender. Johnson tailored his aesthetic approach to the political reality of division, resorting in his first two novels, Mutmaßungen über Jakob (1959) and Das dritte Buch über Achim (1961) to extremely complex stylistic and narrative means. But it is his third novel, Zwei Ansichten (1965), which I propose to examine in this essay, using it as a yardstick, or base-line, with which to compare the two novels by Becker and Schneider mentioned above. I want to show how the literary approach to the divided Germany evolved from a period during which the Cold War was still under way to the first year of Mikhail Gorbatchev’s period in office.

The three novels have not been chosen arbitrarily. They are all set in Berlin, that city acting as a natural focal point and microcosm for the divided country. All three are concerned with characters who wish, for one reason or another, to cross from East to West or from West to East, or both. In each case the narrator is a writer living in West Berlin, and relationships between citizens of the GDR and the Federal Republic are central concerns. Each of the narrators consciously reflects, to a greater or lesser extent, on the means he uses to tell his story. This common ground allows an opportunity to compare the three works with a view to deciding how far changing political circumstances are reflected in the literary assumptions which inform them.

The ‘Zwei Ansichten’ in the title of Uwe Johnson’s novel are those of a West German and an East German. A young West German photographer, identified only as ‘Herr B.’, had a relationship lasting a few days with an East German nurse known only as ‘D.’, early in 1961. After the closing of the border in August 1961 B. attempts to persuade D. to join him in the West; finally she does indeed leave the GDR illegally for West Berlin. The novel is divided into ten chapters narrated alternately through the eyes of B., the West German, and D., the East German. Reviewers were quick to seize on the notion that B. stood for BRD and D. for DDR. The clear implication of this view would be that Zwei Ansichten should be regarded as a thoroughgoing contribution to the Cold War debate, for B. is a mean-spirited character, petty, self-obsessed, unprincipled and materialistic. D., on the other hand, is conscientious, intelligent, observant, and principled. Some West German

1 Quite apart from these credits, by 1984 the economic integration of the Federal Republic and the GDR had proceeded to the point where annual payments to the GDR in one form or another were exceeding DM 2 billion annually. Taken together, these transfers were stabilizing what would otherwise have been a dangerously precarious economy: see The East German Economy, ed. by Ian Jeffries and Manfred Melder (London: Groom Helm, 1987), p. 241.

Readers of the 1960s may have found it difficult not to see in these two characters the reaction of a former East German citizen (Johnson had moved from the GDR to settle in West Berlin in 1959) who was disgruntled with the materialism of the capitalist German state. Johnson had indeed been the victim of anti-communist vitriol after his arrival in the West, facing demands for his works and readings to be boycotted.  

But while a certain bitterness on Johnson’s part is only to be expected, to regard Zwei Ansichten as an indictment of the Federal Republic in favour of the GDR would be a simplification, and a misleading one at that. While B. is a negative character, many of those with whom he comes into contact are principled and generous: the parents of the young man who stole his car, for example, or indeed the young man himself, who stole the car in order to help his girlfriend come to the West by racing under the barrier at the crossing-point. And although D. is a positive character, she feels disillusioned and betrayed by the closing of the border. Moreover, the economic and social disadvantages of life in the GDR are exposed as fully as the unprincipled materialism of the West. Johnson’s interest centres on the motivations people have for crossing the border, both those of Herr B. in his visits to East Berlin, and those of Krankenschwester D. in her final decision to go to the West. The focus of attention in the novel lies not in the relative merits of the two systems but in their points of contact, the border area only not in the sense of the real frontier between the two states but in the processes which impel citizens of one German state to seek out those of another. Johnson is particularly concerned with systematically dismantling the notion that leaving one economic and political system for another under dangerous conditions is in any way romantic. The author chose a constellation of characters which superficially resembles the pattern frequently represented in the West at this time: that of two lovers separated from mutual happiness by an ideological divide. Parallels with Romeo and Juliet abound. But the reality of the story told in Zwei Ansichten is rather different.

B., who has little self-knowledge, manages to convince himself that he is acting out of love for D. when he arranges for her to escape using one of the organizations which sprang up after August 1961. Yet to the reader it is clear that B. is primarily concerned with boosting his self-esteem by fulfilling a dream of driving to East Berlin in an expensive, showy sports car and harking in the awe and admiration of D. Clearly, he has fallen victim to the image of the GDR propagated in the Federal Republic and imagines that D. will be unable to resist the blandishments of one in possession of such a fine symbol of material success. In fact, D. holds socialist views, her quarrel with the GDR being that it failed to adhere to its own professed ideological aims, although even this is not enough to make her reject the East German state. Neither is her decision to go to the West prompted by love for B., although, unlike the West German, she is sufficiently self-aware to realize this. She leaves not for ideological or even economic reasons but because the gradual break-up of her family and personal relationships (linked with the closing of the border) make life less tolerable for her. She makes no positive decision to go to the West; rather she finally takes an opportunity presented to her (having already refused on a previous occasion).

Not only does D. make no positive decision but she actually makes every effort to avoid even thinking about the issue. She suppresses any thoughts and memories which relate to a decision to leave, immersing herself in physical work in order to repress mental activity: ‘Sie schwänzte die Stelle in Gedanken’, we learn at one point. She avoids confronting the problem, allowing events to take their course rather than seizing the initiative herself. Herr B. reacts in a similar fashion, except that in keeping with his character, he swamps his mind with alcohol in order to keep uncomfortable thoughts at bay. He is baffled and confused by the complexities of being sucked into the transit world of illegal border crossings, and tries simply to forget such matters: ‘Er mochte sich nicht erinnern’ (ZA, p. 90). He is frequently successful in this, for various drinking bouts leave him semi-conscious and incoherent at several points throughout the book. Indeed, so successful is B. in forgetting that he gives the wrong colour for D.’s eyes when her false passport is being made up, exposing her to the risk of arrest and a heavy prison sentence.

D.’s final escape to the West, while exciting, has little in common with the countless romantic accounts, in films, books, and the press, of lovers being parted Romeo-and-Juliet-like, and being reunited after an adventure. In Johnson’s book, the two are helpless victims of historical circumstances; they cannot fully understand what is happening to them and have no reasonable means of reacting to the encroachment of world power politics into their daily lives. Heroic individualism in the face of totalitarian communism has no place in this story. The characters are buffeted by history, and only accidentally (or rather, accidentally-on-purpose) resemble the romantic propaganda which was being disseminated by the Springer press during these years. Moreover, they deal with their respective worlds quite separately; the ‘Zwei Ansichten’ have little in common with each other except their helplessness in the grip of forces beyond their control. These circumstances are reflected in the narrative stance.

Initially, and on a cursory reading, the novel seems to have been narrated anonymously, with a merely implied storyteller adopting the point of view first of one character and then of the other, in order to depict a gulf between them which has more to do with personality than ideology. But at the end of the novel we learn that B., on arriving in West Berlin to meet D., was hit by a bus and taken to hospital. At this point a first-person narrator appears, apparently gratuitously, and relates how he accompanied B. to the hospital and made the acquaintance of D. But nothing is gratuitous in Johnson, and more careful reading reveals that the narrator’s presence has been hinted at or implied on several occasions. What he has done is to make it clear that he is present, but at the same time he remains deliberately obtrusive, or, as it were, obtrusively unobtrusive. The narrator makes his presence clear, yet declines to intervene in the story. The effect is to highlight the predicament of the characters; they are no playthings of the author or narrator who can be manipulated at will. They are prey to forces which they, the narrator, and the writer are unable to influence. These are the circumstances which I now compare with the two novels of the 1980s mentioned above.

Peter Schneider’s Der Mauer弹簧er, which appeared in 1982, is much more of a West German text than Zwei Ansichten, which does have something of a censorious if...
differentiated attitude to life in the West. The narrator is again a writer living in West Berlin: not one who is setting out to tell a particular story but one who wishes to try out a number of variations on a theme, the Berlin Wall, to see which, if any, will explain the problem of ‘die Mauer im Kopf’, the ideological division in the minds of those educated under different and opposing economic and political systems, though in the same language and with the same pre-1945 history and traditions. Schneider doubtless would not regard himself as a friend of the West German state, having been active in the 1968 counter-culture and, indeed, a victim of the Radikalenerlaß in the early 1970s. But paradoxically, the narrator of Der Mauerspringer, who is a fairly close projection of the author, finds himself forced to defend the West German state, or at least to defend the social system which has formed him, in an argument with an East German friend. He discovers that what he had regarded as ideological opposition to the establishment in the 1960s was merely a manifestation of a variant establishment which had more in common with what it was meant to oppose than with the socialism of the other German state. The Erzäh lung tries to explain how this can come about, and to explore ways of breaking down the ‘Mauer im Kopf’ by looking at documented cases of people who over the years have succeeded in overcoming the physical obstacle.

Although the narrator finds five main examples of such people, and relays them in the form of stories, he can reach no conclusions about any of them. The cases he finds are all of people, one way or the other, have refused to acknowledge the wall’s existence. The best examples are first, the story of Herr Kabe, who was possessed with an irresistible need to climb over the Berlin Wall from West to East (Kabe is the ‘Mauerspringer’ of the title). This was regarded variously as clear evidence of psychiatric disorder or of an elaborate propaganda stunt staged by authorities in the East. Although Kabe repeated this feat fourteen times, despite being given a personal wall of his own to climb over in South Germany, he will not admit to any political, economic, or ideological reason for his actions. He simply declares that he wanted to go to the other side, and crossing the wall was the quickest way. No doctor could show that he was mentally unstable, apart from an obsessive desire to climb over the Berlin Wall. The implausibility of this story is not really the issue; the point is that Kabe behaves as though the wall is not there. The second story concerns three boys, resident in East Berlin, who make a habit of going to the cinema in West Berlin by getting over the wall, but then return once they have seen the film. Again, the improbability is less important than the fact that the boys behave as though they were living in an undivided city, and that they perform their feat twelve times, never taking the opportunity to stay in the West, apparently unaware of the sensational nature of their activities. These, and others, are the Grenzgänger who populate Schneider’s story, eccentrics and social outsiders who fly in the face of conventional wisdom.

In order to hear the five stories, the narrator has to cross back and forth between East and West, becoming a Grenzgänger himself, and the stories form a kind of structural framework around which descriptions of the efforts to find a solution to the question at hand can be built. If he can explain the ability to ignore the physical border, it may suggest a means of circumventing the ‘Mauer im Kopf’. Although he sees the problem in the epistemology of divided consciousness, and focuses on the difficulties encountered by a writer who raises such questions in literary form, the narrator fails to find anything approaching a solution to the problem. Like the characters in the book, he is faced with a problem of choice. One of the characters chooses to go from West to East, against the grain, two of them refuse to make a choice between East and West, and two make choices neither for East nor for West but against the border. The narrator is unable to choose one particular example, or even a combination of examples, to help solve the problem. But what all the characters have in common is that they attempt to evade the political and historical imperative which arises from the division of Germany.

In contrast to Zwei Ansichten, where the protagonists are channelled into courses of action they had not intended to follow by circumstances which are at once incomprehensible and beyond their control, in Der Mauerspringer we are confronted with a series of cases where characters deal with those circumstances by simply denying their existence, or at least by behaving as far as possible as though they do not exist, despite the physical evidence. A character such as Kabe keeps leaping over the Berlin Wall from West to East not for ideological reasons but because the place he was heading for was directly on the other side. The very existence of the wall is enough reason for him to negate its function. Similarly, the boys who make trips to the West do so in order to go to the cinema; the wall is merely an obstacle to be surmounted in pursuing that aim.

Although it transpires that these methods are ineffective and confined to a few marginalized eccentrics, it is reasonable to suggest that the assumptions which underlie Schneider’s decision to portray such incidents are quite different from the ones which underlie the world Johnson has created in 1965. The characters are no longer prey to greater forces; they have discovered a weak point by calling the bluff of those forces. Instead of submitting to the historical imperative of the divided Germany, they defy the physical evidence, and simply behave as though it did not exist. These characters have understood that the schism is a matter of attitude, admittedly deep-seated, but one which can be challenged. One of the characters, Walter Bolle, even goes to the lengths of declaring a personal war on the border, as a means of toppling the GDR state: ‘Von einer westberliner Wohnung aus predigte er den Krieg gegen die Mauer’ (MS, p. 74). Although Bolle, along with the other characters who attempt to deny or negate the existence of the border, is regarded at best as a harmless eccentric, even dangerously unstable, it is possible to detect in their attitude a crucial element of progress in comparison with Johnson’s characters. They have recognized the nature of the division, and make efforts, with varying degrees of success, to undermine it. Unlike the protagonists of Zwei Ansichten, they refuse to submit to historical forces.

This in turn is reflected in the narrative stance. In Schneider’s novel the narrator by no means remains ostentatiously in the background. (It is, incidentally, possible to remain ostentatiously in the background; in Die Bürgschaft there is a Slasi man so grey, unassuming, and nondescript that he could be spotted as an undercover agent among a crowd of thousands.) In contrast to the narrator of Zwei Ansichten, Schneider’s storyteller puts himself in the foreground, in part by revealing a
problematic relationship with his own subjectivity. While he tries, by employing several perspectives, to rise above the limitations of his standpoint, he has finally to admit that his West German way of thinking prevents him from understanding what would be crucial to a solution of the problem: namely, how the physical act of overcoming the wall in both directions can be transformed into an attitude of mind that would render the border redundant. The narrator is prey to a socialization so strong that he loses control over his own perceptive processes, feeling as though ‘jemand versuche die Kontrolle über die Schaltvorgänge in meinem Hirn an sich zu reißen’ (MS, p. 81). He sees himself and his East German friend Robert as ‘gehorsam den Staaten, die nicht mehr in Sicht sind’ (p. 79). Furthermore, he describes the break-up of his relationship with his girlfriend Lena, who grew up in the GDR, in similar terms; their problems arose from separate, and contrasting, socialization. Conditioned by an atmosphere of mutual suspicion in the GDR, and brought up to regard the Federal Republic as fundamentally hypocritical, she finds herself unable to trust her West German boyfriend in the smallest respect. Here the contrast with Zwei Ansichten is even more revealing. In Johnson’s novel the two protagonists are the unwitting victims of circumstances. In Der Mauerstrenger the narrator remains the victim of circumstances, but is aware of his predicament and tries to find a solution. The extent of his failure is apparent in the way he blames Lena and her socialization for their splitting up, rather than at any point seeking some fault in himself. His analysis of their relationship remains blinkered by a West German (and male) viewpoint, even though he is obviously aware of the danger of ideological subjectivity. The problem is epistemological, rather than overtly political. But it is equally clear that a positive attempt is made, evident in the five stories as well as the narrative stance, to evade the historical imperative of the divided country, even if that attempt is unsuccessful.

In Thorsten Becker’s Die Bürgschaft we progress from subjection to historical forces and beyond into a new kind of historical imperative to a successful strategy for making the border less hermetic. The narrator, again, is a West German writer living in West Berlin, who makes friends with a GDR artist living in East Berlin. When his artist friend seems reluctant to allow him to use a picture for an illustration in his latest book, the narrator steals the picture and uses it without permission, intending to return it with a fee. In the meantime the GDR authorities discover what has happened, and Schlitzer, the artist, finds his planned and longed-for trip to Vienna in jeopardy. Desperately anxious to make amends, the narrator of Die Bürgschaft travels to East Berlin and offers himself to the Stasi as a ‘Bürgschaft’, a guaranteed replacement GDR citizen in case Schlitzer does not return from the West. Implausibly, the plan is accepted and followed, and after several weeks of nail-biting tension Schlitzer does return after all. The main characters end up in the West, although Schlitzer eventually returns to the GDR.

In Die Bürgschaft the historical imperative has been superseded by a moral imperative. The whole plot, as in Schiller’s poem of the same name, depends on trust. When the narrator discovers the predicament he has put Schlitzer in, he is impelled to cross the border for moral reasons: ‘Es halbt sich, ich mußte über die Mauer, um mich wenigstens von einem Teil der Vorwürfe reinzuwaschen.’ Thorsten Becker focuses on the fundamental issue which had to be explored if the division of Germany was to be not only understood but challenged. The bad faith which had begun with East-West recriminations in the Allied Control Council grew into a mutual mistrust which became a major determinant of the historical conflict between East and West. It was Mikhail Gorbachev, spurred on by overwhelming economic problems, who resolved that the cycle of accusation and counter-accusation must be broken if reconciliation was to be achieved. After years of suspicion, each side needed to learn to accept the good faith of the other. The crucial progress which is made in Die Bürgschaft is to recognize that fact and make the issue of mutual trust the pivot on which the story turns. In Zwei Ansichten, B. and D. cannot and do not trust each other. B. is intent on exploiting the East German nurse to boost his own ego, while D. regards B. with thinly disguised contempt. Her refusal to trust him is vindicated by his mistake in forgetting the colour of her eyes; this is a world where the relationship between East and West is characterized by profound mutual suspicion. Yet neither character is in a position to recognize or challenge this state of affairs. Nor does the narrator intervene in order to highlight the problem, although he makes his sympathies indirectly clear by maintaining an ironic distance from B. In Der Mauerstrenger the relationship between the narrator and Lena seems uncomplicated at first, but soon deteriorates to the point where both are on the brink of paranoia. Schneider’s narrator sees the root of the problem in Lena’s East German upbringing, but despite involuntarily adopting her way of seeing, he is unable to understand its operation: ‘Allmählich begann ich dann, mir Lenas Schweife zu eigen machen. Ich erlernte sie wie eine fremde Sprache, ohne ihre innere Struktur zu verstehen’ (MS, p. 87). This narrator recognizes that mutual mistrust arises from epistemological incompatibility, but regards the incompatibility as insurmountable, and so sees the mistrust as an inevitable effect. In Thorsten Becker’s case, on the other hand, confronting the mutual mistrust (in this case between friends rather than lovers) becomes the means by which the incompatibility can be dismantled.

The question of trust is tackled head on in the discussion, or rather negotiation, whereby the narrator, Schlitzer, and the Stasi officer Lärisch reach agreement over the plan for Schlitzer to be allowed his trip to Vienna. The discussion is conducted in an atmosphere of mistrust which, paradoxically, appears in a positive light. This is because all the participants have recognized their mutual suspicion as the core of the problem. That is in itself a positive development. Only by openly acknowledging this to be the case can progress be made. The narrator makes this clear on at least two occasions. At one point he berates himself for lacking ‘das angebrachte Mißtrauen’ (B, p. 151) to check whether his luggage had been searched. And in describing the agreement the three men eventually reach, the narrator comments: ‘Man sieht noch an der Art des Abkommens, welch ein System von Mißtrauen und Absicherungen damals zwischen Lärisch, Schlitzer und mir bestand’ (B, pp. 133–34).

*The narrator’s irritation at being excluded from Lena’s East German, female sodality is palpable, particularly in an allusion to the witches of Macbeth: ‘Eine unähnliche Fremdsprache hielt Lena und ihre zwei Freundinnen im Westen zusammen: drei Verschwörter, die in Trödelläden nach getragenen Jacken und Hosen kramten, immer etwas flachere Schuhe trugen als die eingeborenen Frauen, sich weniger körperbetont kleideten, lauter und selbstbewußter sprachen, öfter ich sagten, sich weniger schminkten und ein trotziges Gelächter ausbrachen, wenn eine von ihnen plötzlich lautlich die erste Strophe eines FDJ-Liedes rezitierte’ (MS, p. 36).

*Thorsten Becker, Die Bürgschaft (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1987; first published Zürich: Ammann, 1985), p. 66. Later references are indicated by the abbreviation B.
But although the three men do agree on a complex arrangement by which Schützer’s journey to the West is to be effected, and put their names to the necessary documents, the fact of reaching agreement (sealed with a handshake) does not in itself remove the mistrust. The narrator still depends entirely on Schützer keeping his part, returning to the GDR, and allowing the narrator to return to the West. There is clearly a considerable element of risk involved. That risk cannot be eliminated; the only solution is to trust Lärisch and Schützer. The narrator manages by these means to make amends for having been the instrument of Schützer’s disappointment. But there is a secondary, unintended, effect, which is to make the border more permeable. By agreeing to change places with Schützer the narrator of Die Bürgschaft achieves something which eludes the characters of both Zwei Ansichten and Der Mauerspringer. He breaks down not only the physical barrier but also the epistemological and ideological divide between East and West, simply by taking the great leap in the dark of relying on the integrity of his East German counterparts, as they do with respect to him. This is by no means blind faith. At all points both sides take as many precautions as possible to ensure that the arrangements will operate as planned, which is to say that the ‘Absicherungen’ mentioned by the narrator are accorded as much importance as possible. Only the final step is subject to all parties behaving with integrity.

These circumstances are once more reflected in the narrative stance. Peter Schneider’s storyteller is positively self-effacing in comparison with the high-profile, authorial narrator of Die Bürgschaft. This is a narrator who draws on the common German tradition (the reference to Schiller’s poem) in order to explore the nature of the relationship between the two German states. The strong authorial projection, which has the confidence of an eighteenth-century narrator’s address to the reader, makes it clear from the beginning how we are to regard his activity as narrator: ‘Ich müßte liegen, wenn ich sagen würde, daß ich das Folgende frei erfunden habe, ebenso wie es die Unwahrheit wäre, zu behaupten, alles habe sich genau so zugetragen, wie ich es berichte. Die Wahrheit ist, daß eine Geschichte nie so erzählt werden kann, wie sie geschehen ist’ (B, p. 14). With these words he lays his cards on the table, openly admitting the limits of his medium and requesting our understanding. His sovereign control of the material is such that the reader is told why certain scenes appear, and that the characters are firmly under the narrator’s authority. He explains how he acquired his first insights into the GDR, and goes on to say:

Um dem Leser davon mitzuteilen, möchte ich gleich versuchen, eine dieser Geschichten [...] soweit mir das mit meinen Worten gelingen kann, wiederzugeben. Zuvor will ich aber noch einer kleinen Szene Erwähnung tun, um dem Leser plastisch zu machen, daß eine Staatsgrenze ubschritten wird und ihm die einschlägigen Erfahrungen in die Erinnerung zu rufen, auch um Glätze, unseren Erzähler, ein wenig vorzustellen, bevor ich ihm das Wort gebe. (B, p. 16)

It is clear that this narrator, in contrast to that of Der Mauerspringer, has a confident, if ironic, relationship with his material. He is open about his intentions and sure of the likely effects; we are not deceived by the false modesty of ‘soweit das mit meinen Worten gelingen kann’. The reader is invited to trust the narrator’s authority.

... But it becomes clear towards the end of the book that the narrator is unreliable after all. Eventually we learn that he has been withholding information which would have put his whole account into a different light. We discover, after the event, that the narrator had been in possession of a West Berlin passport throughout his stay in the GDR (see B, p. 151). Although the passport is invalid, lacking a visa, it nevertheless represents an opportunity for the narrator to talk his way out of his predicament at the office of the West German permanent representative. By concealing this information from the reader for so long, the narrator has taken some trouble to undermine the notion that blind faith is a solution. The key is to proceed, with caution, relying on a healthy scepticism mixed with a judicious measure of trust. At the same time the passport episode shows the narrator on the point of abandoning his faith in Schützer and trying to extricate himself by either inventing an explanation for his presence in the GDR or telling the truth, either of which course of action would almost certainly be greeted with incredulity by the West German authorities. Indeed, he does finally resort to desperate measures, stealing a West German car in an attempt to reach the West. Fortunately, he meets Schützer on the way, returning as arranged, and so finally his original instinct to trust his East German friend is confirmed. In this way the potential sentimentality of a character who nobly sacrifices himself for a friend is avoided, yet the importance of reducing hostility between the two sides by attacking that hostility at its heart, the compulsive tendency of each side to suspect the other’s motives, has been made clear. This reconciliation in the face of seemingly irresolvable differences is the crux of the novel, and has a wider implications than the purely personal, as will become clear below.

Zwei Ansichten, Der Mauerspringer, and Die Bürgschaft, then, all portray human relationships whose underlying assumptions are reflected in the narrative circumstances. Those assumptions change radically during the twenty-year period which divides the publication of the first and the last of the three works. This evolution in aesthetic approach can be explained in at least two ways. One is that the novels were written by three authors whose themes and narrative styles are quite different. Certainly, there is some danger in seeking a consistent development running through works written by various authors. But even if the individual approaches of Johnson, Schneider, and Becker are taken into consideration, there are nevertheless compelling grounds for distinguishing a development which links their work. For the narrative and thematic assumptions which inform these novels do reflect developments in relations between the two Germanies.

By the mid-1960s the Federal Republic had lost the initiative in East–West relations. The Hallstein doctrine had lost any effect it may previously have had in prosecuting Adenauer’s policy of isolating the GDR, and in 1967 was emasculated by the recognition of Romania and Yugoslavia. The attention of the United States was being diverted from central Europe to south-east Asia. The Federal Republic found itself being forced to bow to the reality of post-war Europe, having to acknowledge its helplessness in the face of historical exigency. This trend is reflected in Johnson’s Zwei Ansichten. Here, too, the characters are powerless in the face of political realities. They are forced to acknowledge that their own actions result less from positive initiative than from an instinctive reaction to circumstance. This is not to say that Zwei Ansichten is, after all, somehow meant to symbolize in individual terms the relations between the two countries, but to suggest that the political reality
of the Federal Republic in the early 1960s is reflected in the very assumptions which underlie both the relationship between the two protagonists and the narrative circumstances.

During the 1970s the two Germanies seemed out of favour as a literary theme, only to crop up again with renewed vigour in the 1980s. In 1987, for instance, Martin Walser published *Dorle and Wolf*, a novel whose protagonists spy for the GDR in Bonn. Thomas Steinfeld and Heidrun Suhr suggest that this resurgence of interest in political themes in the 1980s was ‘eine Reaktion auf die Literatur der Innerlichkeit, wie sie in der Bundesrepublik seit den frühen siebziger Jahren besteht’. There may be something in this, but it is equally true that relations between the two Germanies were set on a more normal footing as a result of Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik* after 1969. The relative success of the detente policy in defusing Berlin as a centre of tension and in allowing more flexible relations between the two Germanies made the whole question less prominent during the 1970s, and this is reflected in the lack of literary reaction. But literature can act as a cultural and political barometer, and the drift to the right which culminated in the Wende in 1989 was already evident in the growing policy gap between Helmut Schmidt and his party. The question of inner-German relations began to become more conspicuous once more, particularly in view of the twentieth anniversary, in August 1981, of the closing of the border. Peter Schneider, as a survivor of the student movement of the 1960s, was naturally interested in reasserting the separateness of the two German states in order to oppose pressure from the right to renew claims on eastern territories. Der Maurerspringer expresses the consciousness of those who, by the 1980s, firmly regarded themselves as Bundesbürger rather than as Germans. Both the way relationships between East and West Germans are portrayed and the narrative assumptions of *Der Maurerspringer* tend to affirm the permanence of the two Germanies as separate, sovereign states, re-asserting the spirit of Brandt’s *Ostpolitik* in the face of a right-wing resurgence, not only in the Federal Republic but also in the United States and Britain.

Thorsten Becker comes from a new generation of writers, one unburdened with personal memories of the building of the wall, or with personal involvement in the student movement. Born in 1958, Becker belongs to a generation which experienced little of the idealism of the 1960s, acquiring the kind of cynicism and disillusionment which characterized young people of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This disillusionment was gradually transformed into a positive, a willingness to accept the realities of the modern world in a spirit of satire rather than rebellion. By 1985 a new cultural and political trend was already in place: *Die Bürgschaft* is the first German novel of the Gorbachev era. Uncannily prophetic, the assumptions in Becker’s novel are that the border should be accepted, but only for what it is: a kind of political agreement to maintain conditions of mutual mistrust. Gorbachev recognized after 1985 that real change could be achieved only by substituting trust for threats, and by showing good faith by undertaking reform with no guarantees of support from the erstwhile enemy. Not so foolish as to leave himself defenceless or to enter upon changes which would depend entirely on the goodwill of the West, Gorbachev relied only on that degree of trust necessary to allow reforms to take their own course. There is much of the confidence, goodwill, and good faith of the age of Gorbachev in Becker’s novel. Even the wit and frivolous cynicism which characterizes *Die Bürgschaft* finds its counterpart in Gorbachew and Gerasimov, the Soviet foreign office spokesman who concealed the notion of the Sinatra doctrine as part of his efforts to seize the foreign policy initiative from the United States. Becker, too, freely deploys humorous and satirical devices to demythologize the governmental and political apparatus which maintained the division of Germany. Clearly, it would be fruitless to try to prove that Becker’s novel was an astute analysis of political events which had yet to take place. But if the transformation of Europe that has taken place since 1985 does have at least part of its origins at grass-roots level, then it does not seem too far-fetched to suggest that *Die Bürgschaft* may have picked up the first currents of change in the alternative scene in East Berlin, before they penetrated to the heart of the Kremlin.

What we do know is that the ‘Zwei Ansichten’ of 1965 had merged and swapped by the mid-1980s, and some of the assumptions that Schneider made in 1982 concerning the inevitable separate consciousness prevalent in the two German states no longer seemed so certain for the subsequent generation. But even after the opening of the border on 9 November 1989, Peter Schneider maintained his views in this respect. In February 1990 he wrote: ‘Nach dem ersten Einheitsrauschen wird es sich herausstellen, daß entlang der Mauer nicht nur zwei Staaten, sondern auch zwei Lebenskulturen entstanden sind, Welche Differenzen über Nacht verschwinden und welche sich als lebendig und resistent erwiesen werden, läßt sich noch nicht sagen.’ This, too, was prescient: events were soon to demonstrate that the problems of inner-German relations will not disappear with the unification of Germany.

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12 Paradoxically, Helmut Kohl’s coalition was to drive forward the political and economic integration of the two Germanies (see the opening paragraph of this article). This was not to become apparent for some time, however, since Kohl’s need to cultivate the right in order to maintain his power base gave rise to a good deal of rhetoric, as well as political and financial support for the lobby of the Vertriebenen.