

MOTHERHOOD, MELODRAMA, AND MASCULINITY IN WOLFGANG BECKER'S GOOD BYE LENIN!

In February of 2003, over twelve years after the collapse of the German Democratic Republic and its ensuing absorption into the Federal Republic of Germany, Wolfgang Becker's film *Goodbye Lenin*, which narrates the ascension to manhood of Alexander Kerner in East Berlin during the turbulent period before and after the opening of the Wall, met with popular and critical acclaim in both East and West (Finger, Festenberg). Whereas earlier cinematic attempts to write GDR history as family narrative had elicited mixed reactions, for example Margarethe von Trotta's 1994 melodrama *Das Versprechen*, or had encountered popular enthusiasm largely on one side of the former inner-German border, as did Leander Hausmann's 1999 comedy *Sonnenallee* (Peitz), *Good Bye Lenin* successfully negotiated both the former East-West border and the boundary between melodrama and comedy. Its strategy for doing so was the return to quite familiar cinematic terrain: a mother-son family romance in which the son overcomes the mother by creating a space for identification with her through memory. *Good Bye Lenin* intervenes in the question of how to treat the GDR past by framing the topic as family drama, yet unlike Margarethe von Trotta's *Das Versprechen*, it focuses not on a protagonist whose masculine ambitions (as lover, father, and scientist) are crushed by the GDR, but on a young male whose successful ascension to manhood coincides with his adaptation to the new capitalist system.

Alex's adaptation to capitalism requires him to come to terms with his childhood socialist imaginary, which he does by projecting it onto his mother in such a way that it can be both remembered and disavowed. This point is stated most clearly in the closing voiceover in which he describes the GDR as a land that in his memory will always be linked to his mother. Viewed entirely through the eyes of her son, Christiane Kerner becomes an overdetermined symbol for an idyllic GDR childhood in which Alex's ego is constituted through his mother's love and approval. The end of the GDR corresponds with a crisis in the mother-son idyll, requiring a psychic adjustment on the part of the son, resolved through a redrawing of public and private borders: the East German mother, who before the fall of the Berlin Wall had served as a critical mediator between public ideology and private family life, comes to occupy a strictly private space of memory that, while worthy of preservation, has become politically and economically without use, like the GDR money that Frau Kerner has kept hidden in the kitchen cabinet.

To understand the film's treatment of the mother-son relationship it is necessary to examine its negotiation of melodramatic conventions within the culturally-specific discursive field surrounding German unification and the East German past. In particular, during times of rapid social change, melodrama has served to represent conflicts between the demands of the socioeconomic system on the individual and the desire for continuity with one's past, origins, or roots (Gledhill). It is thus not surprising to find in *Good Bye Lenin!* that a mother-son relationship serves to represent the conflicting desires surrounding German reunification: the longing for a return to GDR childhood is juxtaposed with the desire to master the new territory of West German capitalism. While this type of melodrama can serve as a site for representing conflicts often ignored by

political discourse, feminist film critics have argued that it can also reinforce gendered narratives of development that support the public/private (masculine/feminine) dichotomy constituted in nineteenth-century literary and theatrical genres in which cinematic melodrama has its roots (Kaplan, "Mothering"). Feminist film critics have also noted the overvalued yet critically ambiguous role of the mother-son relationship in the history of cinematic melodrama: although they have often been portrayed more positively than mother-daughter relationships, this has come at the expense of the mother, who functions largely as vehicle and/or obstacle to the desire of the male child (Kaplan, "Mothering" 117). The widespread popularization of psychoanalytic discourse in twentieth-century cinema provided a further intensification of son-centered representations of the mother: mother-dependency or mother-attachment became the primary obstacle to adult male subjectivity (Kaplan, "Motherhood").

A second interpretive layer is added to the mother-son relationship in *Good Bye Lenin* when one considers the role played by the mother figure in the state-sanctioned socialist imaginary of East Germany, as well as in texts written after reunification that purport to portray the GDR from an ideology-free perspective. For example, Thomas Brussig's highly successful novel, *Helden wie wir* (1995), loudly rejects all forms of GDR-nostalgia, coded as feminine by association with biological and literary mother figures. A central aspect of Brussig's critique of East German society lies in his satiric portrait of the "feminine side of the GDR," which manifests itself in narrator Klaus Uhltscht's mother, a woman obsessed with hygiene, hypermoralism, and prudish medical language. Through Klaus, Brussig gives voice to an unabashedly phallogentric language¹ that revels in the repetition of sexual street talk and culminates when Klaus forces the opening of the Berlin Wall by baring his abnormally enlarged penis to the East German border guards, an act interpreted by one critic as exhibitionism directed against the mother and maternal taboos.²

Brussig understands his own novel to be not simply the representation of an idiosyncratic East German childhood or a brazen comic irreverence but rather the rejection of an entire (feminine) way of remembering the East German past and an act of literary resistance against the kitsch of self-serving nostalgia that celebrates the unfulfilled ideals of socialism in the guise of *Multisozialismus* (Zachau, "Volk").³ In both the novel itself and his commentary on it, Brussig rejects gendered strategies of remembering the GDR that favor a feminine-coded socialist utopian imaginary believed to be superior to the repressive paternalist state; he considers these to be merely the self-justifications of a generation of GDR mothers, who, like Frau Uhltscht, proclaim, "Helden wie wir haben nichts zu bereuen" (Brussig 299). Nevertheless, in *Helden wie wir*, Brussig himself reenlists a gendered understanding of the GDR past in the form of a trope of failed manhood. In a 1998 interview Brussig stated,

Ich hatte eine bestimmte Vorstellung von der DDR-Soziologie. Nämlich, daß es einmal die autoritär-repressive Seite gegeben hat. Daneben hat es die mütterliche Seite gegeben, die dafür gesorgt hat, daß Konflikte nicht zum Ausbruch gekommen sind. . . . Aus diesen beiden Seiten habe ich versucht, eine Farulle zu bauen, in der ein Junge lebt, der für die Gesellschaft steht. Ich wollte gucken, wie sich das entwickelt, wohin das geht. Das ging dann in die Richtung, die wir kennen: Minderwertigkeitskomplexe, Größenwahn, aber auch Geheimtheit, Unruhe, nie

erwachsen werden. So war eines der Schlagworte in dieser Zeit auch: 40 Jahre Kindergarten sind genug. Der Bogen der mütterlichen Seite läßt sich bis zu Christa Wolf nachvollziehen.
(Straubel et al 56-7)

Significant here is the slippage between the gender-free metaphor of infantilization and the gendered trope of thwarted manhood central to *Helden wie wir*. The forty years of Kindergarten are figured as the subjugation of the young male body to a threatening female presence, which becomes both the castrating mother of psychoanalysis and the abstract maternal imaginary of *Mutisozialismus*. Brussig underscores the link between the personal and the political when Klaus hears a speech delivered by East German writer Christa Wolf shortly before the opening of the Wall, in which she sought to inspire protestors with the injunction, "Stell dir vor, es ist Sozialismus und keiner geht weg!" (Brussig 285). Wolf's idealist abstractions about socialism provide the target against which Brussig asserts an aesthetic of play, pleasure, and concrete description.⁴ He derides her metaphysical ponderings on the meaning of socialism as the perfect antidote to Klaus's uncontrollable sexual excitement.

Heroes Like Us remains entangled in an ideological field of representation that framed political issues as family narratives, in spite of the author's emphatic claims that his novel represents a liberation from GDR ideology. As Julia Hell demonstrates persuasively in *Post-Fascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis, History, and the Literature of East Germany*, family narratives were central to the constitution of the socialist subject in the GDR. The GDR's foundational discourse of antifascism centered on an obsession with the father's body: literary manifestations of this fascination reveal, however, a father-son tension focused on the difference between the ideal socialist father and the real biological father; mother-son relationships are less problematic and mothers often serve as mediators between fathers and sons. Whereas Brussig's narrative directs anger and aggression at the East German mother, disavowing any desire for her or for the lost GDR, *Good Bye Lenin!* models a different kind of disavowal, one in which the son's desire for the GDR past is projected onto the mother and allowed a continued existence through her. Brussig's protagonist expresses a manic rage against his mother which Freud identifies in *Mourning and Melancholia* as the final overcoming of a melancholy caused by the loss of a highly ambivalent love-object (257). Rather than incorporating the characteristics of his mother and the lost GDR imaginary into his adult masculine subjectivity, Klaus Uhltsch's hyperphallic megalomania compensates for his earlier submission to these rejected objects. *Helden wie wir* is important for the understanding of *Good Bye Lenin!* precisely because its mother-son narrative engages with the same family-centered GDR ideology, which as Hell demonstrates, can best be examined not for its overt political content, but on the level of unconscious fantasy.

Like Brussig's novel, *Good Bye Lenin* is narrated in the first-person by a young man who comes of age at the time of the *Wende*. While Alex Kerner is still a child, his father defects to West Berlin, leaving his wife and children behind for another woman, or so Alex is led to believe by his mother. Frau Kerner suffers a physical and emotional breakdown from which she recovers through Alex's constant attention. Her breakdown is signified in the film by her loss of speech and by her absent gaze, a vacuous stare that eerily resembles her active gaze in two later scenes of the film: her scrutinization of a

political demonstration in which she sees her son being arrested by the police and her encounter with a statue of Lenin. Alex's subjectivity is in many ways constituted through his mother's gaze. One might argue that his fear of its loss motivates his actions; no longer receiving the approving gaze of the mother threatens the son's subjectivity. Significantly, not only the maternal gaze is thematized, but also the child's: little Alex watches in awe the ascension of cosmonaut Sigmund Jähn into the cosmos on the official East German television news. The medium of television and the act of watching prerequisite to it later become the means through which Alex will uphold the illusion of the GDR for his mother, using fake newscasts that he videotapes with a friend.

After returning home from the hospital, Frau Kerner finds a new husband: the socialist state, as Alex tells us. She embodies *Mutisozialismus*, teaching songs of love for the homeland to the Junge Pioniere, the GDR's state-sponsored scouting organization for young children. As Julia Hell reminds us, the ideal East German mother often occupied the space of *Volk* and *Heimat*; she is the origin to which the male hero ultimately returns (Hell 64 ff.). Yet, whereas Brussig's socialist mother had been without humor, abstract and literal-minded, varying from the bureaucratic father-state only in the intensity of her personal interest in supervising her son's bodily functions, Frau Kerner represents a human counterweight to the rigidity of the paternal state. She seeks to transform society gradually through constructive criticism, poking fun at the mistakes of collectivized production, which often leaves behind all regard for the feminine material body.⁵

Significantly, conflict enters the mother-son relationship in *Good Bye Lenin!* even before the fall of the Wall and the end of GDR socialism. Alex begins to criticize Honecker's government, which his mother interprets as the desire to follow in his father's footsteps and leave for the West; she rejects "Abhauen" as an abandonment of the socialist struggle. Alex's loss of faith in the father state and desire for revolutionary change, figured as movement, leads him to participate in a demonstration against the regime on the very evening his mother takes part in the celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the GDR. As Frau Kerner steps out of a taxi to get a closer look at the protestors, she sees her son being arrested by the police and suffers a heart attack, a traumatic reenactment of the breakdown she suffered with the loss of her husband over ten years earlier. As his mother lies motionless and unconscious in a hospital bed for eight months, things begin to move in the outside world with a series of personal and political upheavals: the opening of the Wall, the whirlwind changes in East German society as it becomes economically integrated with the West, and the awakening of Alex's romantic feelings with a student nurse from Russia. Thus, the temporary absence of the mother seems to be a crucial prerequisite for the political and sexual development of both Alex and the GDR. When she awakens, both appear as a fait accompli. Yet because the doctor advises Alex that the consequences of another shock for Frau Kerner may be fatal, he vows to prevent his mother from learning anything about recent historic events, a task which he carries out with creativity and zeal. While on the surface Alex's motivation is to keep his mother alive, his intense dedication to his task also suggests a deeper psychological need to create a private space where the GDR past can continue to exist as a mother-son idyll, without the conflict that threatened his relationship with his mother at the time of the protests.⁶

This brief summary should indicate the central role played in the film by traditional gendered metaphors found in mother-son melodrama, in particular the conflict between origin, stasis, and continuity embodied in the mother and motion, adventure, and change embodied in the son and the father figures. The film locates this opposition already within the GDR family of Alex's childhood, constructing male and female principles onto which the capitalism (realism)/socialism (idealism) dichotomy can be transposed. With Alex's biological father gone, Sigmund Jähn steps in as object of his narcissistic admiration; one of the first images we see is the boy shooting rockets into the air, a gesture which also ends the film as the adult Alex propels his mother's ashes into the heavens attached to a firework rocket. "She's somewhere up there now, just like Sigmund Jähn back then," he says. This transfer of the maternal onto the sublime space previously reserved for the ideal father is one of the central narrative trajectories of the film. It suggests that for Alex, his mother serves a crucial function in mediating the relationship with a father figure that has been discredited by the victory of West German capitalism.

On another level, Alex's usurpation of his mother's agency reflects the film's appropriation of a traditionally women's genre to tell a story of male development. *Good Bye Lenin!* contains many elements associated with the weepie, which Linda Williams defines as a genre "addressed to women in their traditional status under patriarchy—as wives, mothers, abandoned lovers, or in their traditional status as bodily hysteria or excess, as in the frequent case of the woman 'afflicted' with a deadly or debilitating disease" (269). Significantly, very little weeping actually takes place, since our focus is always being deflected from the mother's physical and emotional pain to the challenges that Alex must overcome in keeping her from knowing the truth; these provide the comic aspect of the story. It is perhaps the film's inscription of a familiar cinematic and psychoanalytic model of development into a specific cultural imaginary that, as Hell reminds us, relied heavily on such models that accounts for its success. While *Good Bye Lenin!* has something to offer contemporary Germans in both East and West from a number of subject positions—both those who mourn the GDR and those who reject nostalgia—a critical analysis of the film should be wary of its popular success. Might it not be the most recent and best example of what Eric Rentschler has referred to as the post-wall German cinema of consensus?⁷ Does *Goodbye Lenin!*'s success lie in its careful manipulation of familiar generic patterns, its ability to incite audience's feeling of recognition when reencountering recognizable structures of meaning, while providing just the right amount of new twist in a set of gender reversals, which ultimately, however, serve to reinscribe the old psychoanalytic pattern of masculine development? If the central rupture in the film is the conflict between mother and son and the psychic repression necessitated by it, how does the film's treatment of this moment of repression allow or preclude alternative readings of the mother-son relationship?

The repression of the mother-son conflict manifests itself in Frau Kerner's forgetting of the cause of her heart attack and how she came to be in the hospital. Alex actively encourages this repression by improvising an alternative story of heat-exhaustion caused by standing in line to buy groceries. This rather improbable explanation represents the beginning of Alex's story-telling efforts, which he will expand and refine, eventually

with the technical assistance of his amateur filmmaker friend and coworker Denis. On the surface, both *Good Bye Lenin!* and the films within the film construct Frau Kerner as the passive object of Alex's active manipulation; the repression of the conflict is necessary for her psychic and physical integrity, not Alex's. Nevertheless, the film emphasizes the psychological function of recreating the GDR for Alex in a number of ways, including the way he seeks to attract his mother's approving gaze through the videos and refuses to examine the causes of his own obsession with recreating the GDR past.⁸

The mediating role played by Frau Kerner in Alexander's ambivalent relationship to his own GDR past is exemplified by the title of the film itself. On the most obvious level it is an allusion to taking leave from Marxist ideology. Yet it also represents a kind of patricide; a killing of the ideal father discussed by Julia Hell, whose sublime steered body dominated GDR iconography. Becker emphasizes the link between the biological family and the socialist imaginary by beginning with a home video showing the entire Kerner family at their summer cottage before the father's defection to West Berlin; this is followed by a series of photographic shots showing the most famous icons of the East German city landscape, into which the figure of Lenin is inserted in three different ways: first as an oversized poster, then as a fixed statue, and finally as a rotating statue that dominates the middle of the shot. This is the imaginary into which Alex is interpellated via the family structure and from which he must take leave. His mother's function as mediator becomes evident in the scene which represents the high point of the film: the appearance of the Lenin statue floating above East Berlin streets suspended from a helicopter.

Lenin reappears at the very moment when Alex has fallen asleep, allowing his mother to seize the opportunity to venture out of bed and onto the street. Frau Kerner has the possibility of a second birth; she takes small, tiny steps like those of her baby granddaughter playing on the floor. As she leaves the building she looks with apparent confusion at the signs of capitalism: an Ikea advertisement, West German cars parked on the street. In this context, the arrival of Lenin offers a double potential: as the solidifying center of socialist ideology he offers a familiar grounding to Frau Kerner, her reinterpellation into the socialist imaginary. Yet because the statue appears in motion, floating through the air, it also suggests a moment of flux when everything is possible, when freedom from ideology becomes imaginable. Lenin appears to address Frau Kerner with the raised hand of the socialist greeting, bringing her to a standstill, capturing her gaze, and placing her perilously close to that border between seeing and non-seeing suggested in her vacuous look after her first breakdown. This moment is juxtaposed with Alex's awakening, his frantic race down the stairs and into the street to find his mother, pushing tension to a maximum as we wait to see whether Alex will master the situation before it is too late. The montage that cuts back and forth between Alex and his mother offers the film's greatest visual intensification of the opposition it constructs between masculine motion and feminine stasis. We breathlessly await Frau Kerner's interpretation of what she has seen; will she be reassured by Lenin's gaze or will she recognize the significance of the removal of the statue from its location, collapse from the shock and die, as Alex feared? Or will she lose her sanity, descend into mental confusion, deprived of the centering element of her subjectivity? The film offers a solution both on the level

of iconography and plot: we see the statue ascending upwards to that higher, ideal realm to which the cosmonauts had traveled just before Alex finds his mother on the street and returns home with her, where he will show her another fake newscast to account for what she has seen.

The encounter between Frau Kerner and the Lenin statue cites the act identified by Hell as central to East German antifascist ideology: "The East German hegemonic project is one which demands subjection to the antifascist father and holds up his sublime body for identification" (Hell 35). By not allowing his mother to be confronted with the end of GDR socialism, Alex forces her to carry out this submission for him vicariously. Functioning as an intermediary, she enables him to disavow his own submission to the GDR father state by projecting it onto her. Hell identifies this maternal function in important East German novels and interprets it psychoanalytically: the son must project his desire for the father (a castrating and feminizing desire) onto the mother.

As I have argued in more detail elsewhere, Breidel's text, along with those by Marchwitza and Gotsche, unconsciously links the threat of National Socialism to woman as a reminder of castration, which within a patriarchal order signifies the position of the powerless. Women in these texts signify, above all, the castrated, not the castrating; their threat resides not in any position of strength but, on the contrary, in their association with weakness. Structurally and thematically, these narratives marginalize and contain what stands as a reminder of castration, namely, women and femininity. (49)

Viewed from this perspective, *Good Bye Lenin* actually returns the mother to a position she occupied in early GDR literature, one ostensibly more conducive to masculine ego development; Brussig's castrating mother, in contrast, produces a perverse hyperphallic narrator-protagonist. Yet both texts reinscribe son-centered narratives of motherhood that resonate with psychoanalytic models of masculine development.

The son's repression, his need to project his own desire for the socialist father onto his mother, becomes evident in the very moment that *Good Bye Lenin!* visually stages a return to the childhood familial idyll, as Alex, his sister, and her boyfriend accompany Frau Kerner to the family summer cottage. Since the maintenance of this idyll is ultimately impossible on an economic level in the new capitalist society and on a psychological level—after all, the biological father present in the home video is absent in the mother-son idyll—a reappearance of the mother-son conflict pushes Alex's development forward. Frau Kerner suddenly reveals the real reason why she had not accompanied their father to the West: she had remained in the East not because her husband had left her for another woman, but because her fear of the punishment for trying to escape, the loss of her children, kept her from acting. Not attempting to join her husband in the West was the greatest mistake of her life, she says. Alex's reaction represents one of only two scenes in which his sympathy for his mother is called into question (the earlier one being their argument at the time of the protests and fortieth anniversary celebration): he walks away and the viewer's attention is at least partly diverted from the mother's suffering to the son's pain in seeing his mother's weakness.

One could imagine that the need for Alex to maintain the illusion has become superfluous: if his mother's socialist idealism was merely the result of failure and loss

rather than true conviction, why should Alex continue to preserve the lost GDR for her? Admitting the false basis of his mother's ideology would also, however, compromise his own past: hence, he continues with the illusion, although his sister and girlfriend urge him to tell his mother the truth, even creating a final video that will provide closure. Significantly, the conflict arising in the mother-son idyll also effects another reversal of gender positions: his mother expresses the desire to have left for the West just as her son so actively seeks to preserve the GDR. Nevertheless, it reinforces rather than subverts the opposition between masculine motion and feminine stasis, for his mother's desire to escape is a failed one, her submission to socialism a necessity—in Hell's psychoanalytic terms she becomes an abject figure for castration.

It is within this context that we should interpret Alex's encounter with Sigmund Jähn as a taxi driver. The unlikelihood of this encounter suggests a return of repressed elements from Alex's childhood; in post-Wall Germany Jähn is an obsolete figure, a symbol of broken manhood, a figure whom Alex must now confront directly. Nevertheless, coming to terms with Jähn again requires the mediation of his mother. Alex's final act of filmmaking calls into question the precise nature of his mother's and his own relationship to truth and illusion. In a scene at the hospital, where Alex's mother has been readmitted following a worsening of her condition after the sudden rupture in the mother-son idyll, we see and hear a discussion through a glass window between Alex's girlfriend and his mother: she tells Frau Kerner that there are no more borders and only one country now. This pronouncement is ambiguous; it need not necessarily be interpreted as the end of the GDR. Yet the viewer is now privy to information that Alex does not have, enabling a degree of distanciation from Alex's perspective. Nevertheless, the final newscast created by Alex and Denis, although fantastic, accounts for the fall of the Wall in a way that apparently restores the illusion of a socialist victory. Staging the resignation of Erich Honecker, which in reality had occurred one year earlier, Alex enlists Sigmund Jähn himself to appear on screen as the new head of state and to announce the opening of the Wall, an act which will allow West German refugees from capitalism to pass freely into East Germany. As Frau Kerner watches the newscast, her gaze gradually moves away from the television to become fixed on Alex. As he turns to look at her she gazes at him with unconcealed pride, suggesting a complicity between them in not destroying the illusion and a reinstatement of the mother-son idyll. At the same time, it represents a vindication of *Mutrisozialismus*: by imaging an East Germany that draws refugees from the West rather than sending them there, Becker responds cinematically to Christa Wolf's appeal to imagine, "[E]st Sozialismus und keiner geht weg" (Brussig 285), the very statement that Brussig's protagonist derides as irrelevant, abstract, and thoroughly lacking in imagination.

Alex's mother becomes the vehicle for his fantasizing an East Germany victory, fulfilling his childhood dreams of manly heroism but at the same time displacing them onto his mother as utopian ideals that with her death will be relegated to memory. Although *Good Bye Lenin!* directs a certain degree of irony towards the son's perspective—can we, after all, trust the narrator's final voiceover celebrating the fact that his mother never learned the truth about the GDR?—it also confirms Alex's agency: he has attained manhood by appropriating the tools of the father state to create his own

socialist imaginary. Alex is even able to become the agent for a final reunion between his mother and father before Frau Kerner's death. Significantly, his sister remains an abject figure, unable to face her father again. Alex's adult masculinity stands in stark contrast to the anti-maternal phallic perversity of Brussig's Klaus Uhltscht; nevertheless, both texts figure coming to terms with an East German boyhood as overcoming the mother, whether through the integrative strategy of sentimentalization or the oppositional strategy of rage. Both *Good Bye Lenin!* and *Helden wie wir* reveal that ideology must be analyzed at a deeper level than that of overt political commentary; their strongly gendered post-*Wende* portrayals of East German socialism attest to the continuity of cinematic and literary tropes of masculine development across the ruptures of regime change and reunification.

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NOTES

¹ See Nause, who makes the important observation that Brussig stages the spontaneous orality of Klaus's narrative by framing it as a taped interview with a *New York Times* reporter. See also Frölich, who refers to Klaus's mixture of megalomania and self-castigation as the "protagonist's virile and phallic neurosis," which has its origins in the family structure that reproduces GDR taboos (24). "The overbearing mother with her overprotective and at the same time demanding attitude and militant supervision of her son's hygiene is a major cause not only of his extreme obsessive-compulsive behavior, but also of his strong sense of inferiority" (24). What is crucial here is Klaus's failed manhood, lying in the inability to integrate desire and repression: his hyperphallicism is represented as a response to the castration-anxiety caused by his mother.

² See Gabler, who writes that Klaus's exposure of his genitals to the border guards is an act of revenge for the symbolic castration by the mothers (biological and figurative). His pride in finally showing his penis arises from the pleasure he takes in humiliating these mothers (150).

³ See also Zachau, "Wie Amerika . . ." in which the author notes that Brussig's figuration of *Multisozialismus* has been uncritically replicated in subsequent literary portrayals of the GDR past. This same sort of uncritical acceptance of Brussig's anti-maternal trope is also evident, in my opinion, when Nause writes that Brussig "shows with great humour that this generation will be remembered for their hypocritical attitudes" (165).

⁴ Brussig stated that he "simply followed the pleasure principle" when writing the novel (Straubel et al. 55). It should be noted that Karin Saß, who played the role of Christiane Kerner, was a well-known East German actress, achieving fame in 1979 through her performance in the marital drama *Bis dass der Tod euch scheidet*.

⁵ Kaplan writes of the development of melodramatic forms in nineteenth century literature, "In a rapidly changing world—one that the male order was not sure was all to the good—the Mother was to uphold, continue and represent the old values in danger of being swept away by the tide of changes that seemed beyond control" ("Mothering," 116).

⁶ One need not accept Remschler's argument in toto—that contemporary German cinema is an affirmative enterprise primarily interested in entertaining the German public and making them feel normal, whereas the New German Cinema challenged its audience to reflect on national history and identity—but certainly the question of the validity of the consensus produced by *Good Bye Lenin!* is well worth asking.

⁸ This was an aspect also not lost on the critics. See, for example, Festenberg.

⁹ The specter of mental breakdown is invoked in an earlier scene in which Frau Kerner temporarily believes her husband still lives with them.

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