Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

Trümmerliteratur: The Shift In the German Consciousness After Loss In the Second World War

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Preface

I'd finally found the perfect book to rub in Trevor's face. H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds,* the highest level book I could find in my Middle School library. He was a grade ahead of me and knew that I was far behind my recommended reading level. In 7th grade I was struggling to figure out why everyone was reading books that didn't have pictures in them. I only read books without pictures for class, and more often than not I would resort to Sparknotes to keep up. Here I was holding a book that was

Trevor knew this and he, for some reason, liked to always show how superior he was to me in all our time together on the bus. He was the neighbor to my best friend at the time and I think he thought that that gave him the excuse to be as passive aggressively mean to me all he wanted. He and I were never close. In fact we'd had more blow ups towards each other than I care to remember.

Up until about this point in the 7th grade I had absolutely no literary motivation. No desire to read anything more than my picture books that acted as a security blanket. I'd read the same series over and over since 4th grade. I knew most of those books verbatim. I was comfortable and happy in this illustrated mediocrity. However, thanks to Trevor, that changed. I'm sure as many of you know, spite is one Hell of a motivator.

And so I did it. I got on the bus and with that book. Phase One accomplished. The next stage in Operation: Take That Trevor was to make sure that he knew I had this book without me showing it off. If I just set it on my seat there was a very strong chance he wouldn't notice it. Failure. However, if I held it up and shoved it in his face with me literally had my nose buried in it then he would assume I checked it out with the sole intention of showing it off to him. That

would've been even worse. My brilliant solution to this quandary I found myself in was quite simple: I would read the book.

I didn't set out to become a reader from this experience. In fact, it was mostly meant to be a one and done deal. I had no idea what to expect with this book. I braced myself for Shakespeare, for the dull and dry poetry we were forced to consume in our "Language Arts" classes written by people who couldn't organize a poem without a "Thee" or a "Thou" or a "Henceforth." I was in for a surprise when I saw that this book was not like that at all. Instead of being dry and boring, full of flowery language and grand theorization about the universe, this book was startlingly straight-forward. It was written in a laid-back style. There was action everywhere. Wells' style made it seem like TV was funneled directly into my head. It amazed little Zach that the pictures from his favorite picture books could be recreated in his head by words alone if the author was so skillful.

And while it wasn't quite history from there, my course towards English was set. I became an obsessive reader shortly after. Throughout most of middle school I still consumed a mostly 50/50 split between Nancy Drew picture books and pretty basic children's novels, but by the end of 8th grade I'd kicked the picture book addiction almost completely. I began my upper-level reading with Agatha Christie (I still to this day have never correctly deduced any of her "Who-Dun-Its"), then graduated to Stephen King, John Grisham, Chinua Achebe, George R.R. Martin, and eventually concluded my High School English career being a Shakespeare nut and trying for the first time to get through Milton's *Paradise Lost.* I went from asking for expensive video games for Christmases and birthdays to being contented with gift cards to Books-A-Million and Barnes and Noble. Because of my lack of funds the relatively cheap

classics became my best friends, letting me quench a sheer desire for reading on a shoestring budget while unintentionally strongly preparing myself for a future in academic literature.

All that being said, college wasn't a foregone conclusion for me yet. I spent several months in the gym religiously trying to get in shape for the Air Force. I briefly considered trying to move east towards some family to give acting a go after my performances in high school were met with widespread acclaim. I even considered going to a vocational school in order to learn welding, a skill that I enjoyed during high school and one where my dad could help get my foot in the door. However, when all was said and done I was too heavy and far too out of shape for the Air Force, I realized acting was not realistic without a safety net, and my dad pushed me away from iron-working because of the sheer danger of the job. Though it was against my will, my hand was played and college was in the cards.

I chose Kutztown mostly on a whim. It was the only school I applied for, and I was only seriously considering applying at one other before I realized that the cost would be prohibitively high. I was accepted into KU very quickly and, to my surprise, received incredible financial aid. Money, my old enemy, would not have as much say in my education as I'd originally feared. However, I was still confronted with the question of what I wanted to do. After all, college is no help if you don't have a degree.

I came in as an English major mostly because I was scared of being undeclared. I never intended to stay with English. It was just a placeholder. That being said, while I was there I was beholden to the curriculum. And one of those tenants was proficiency in a foreign language. I thought to myself "Take German. You did that in High School." It didn't take long for me to fall absolutely in love with KU's German faculty. The two professors proved to be incredibly helpful

and managed to make German fun. Aside from the primary German language courses, perhaps my favorite was German Literature in English Translation. Before this class I'd never taken an interest in German literature. In fact, I don't think it would be inaccurate for me to say that I had almost no interest in any literature that wasn't American or English in origin. My brief encounters with foreign language literature during my AP English classes in High School had generally turned me off to literature in translation (I blame Dostoyevsky). Originally I had only chosen this class for the sake of taking another class with a professor who I adore. However, after beginning that course with Goethe's *Faust* I was hooked. Seeing how this language that to me was always the embodiment of stereotypical joylessness and harshness (even after having studied it for several years at this point) could be as full of meaning and subtlety as the language of the Bard himself was truly eye-opening to me. Those feelings were only confirmed after we'd read Dürrenmatt's *Die Physiker/The Physicists,* Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen/Spring Awakening,* and, as we will get to soon enough, Borchert's *Draußen vor der Tür/The Man Outside.* I'd never found myself so drawn to the literature of a language that wasn't my own before, and it's no exaggeration to say that this is the class that convinced me to pursue the German language far more vigorously than I'd considered before.

I also found myself falling in love with the Bard again in Shakespeare's Early Plays, a class that admired the Bard's earlier works. My professor was able to invoke excitement in our subject material by her sheer love for it. While I am relatively familiar with Shakespeare's later plays, I can say I had a great time acquainting myself *The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Titus Andronicus,* and *Henry V,* just as examples of plays that I didn't know well at all before my time in the class truly got underway. I've always had a great curiosity with Shakespeare. I viewed his

works as a rewarding challenge to take up, one where you will not be able to breeze through the material without trying, but one where when you do accomplish the task that's presented to you the reward far outweighs any suffering that you may have suffered in the process.

However, for as much fun as I was having with these classes, and for as rewarding as I found them, I was still set on changing my major, though at this point my reasons for desiring a change were becoming cloudier and cloudier. The only compelling argument I was making to myself was that "No one makes money with an English degree." I was convinced that English, for as much as I loved it, was infeasible, and as a result I began seriously looking at alternatives. The leader in my mind was Communications, and I made the decision to transfer over.

What a mistake. My semester as a Communications major was absolutely miserable. While I was still fortunate enough to be taking an English class, I found that the material I was studying in my new major to not agree with me at all. For the first time in my college career I'd lost my excitement for education. I struggled to get out of bed to go to class in the morning. The only thing that kept me going was my one English class and the theater club on campus where I was flirting with the idea of directing productions here on campus. However studying for Communications proved to be a miserable experience for me. I was forced to drop my German classes and the Communications classes I was learning were miserably dull. This is not an indictment to the faculty, far from it as the fun I had with them is what delayed my decision to leave the major for as long as I did, but whenever I went home after a long day of class and thought about my future I could not see Communications there with me.

I transferred to Cinema, Television, and Media for the Fall Semester. However, before we could begin with the fall we had to get through the summer. And the summer of 2018 was

particularly eventful for me. I would say that it may be the most influential three months of my life thus far. That is thanks to two developments.

The first development was that the stress of college, particularly of my semester in Communication, had led me to swell like a balloon. I weighed 270 pounds at the start of that summer. I cannot say exactly what it is that got me to realize that I was literally eating myself to an early grave, but what I can say is that it inspired me to take fitness seriously. That summer I did it largely on my own. I did a lot of running and spent a lot of time at Planet Fitness. There is nothing that tests a person's mettle quite like battling morbid obesity. There are no tricks. There are no shortcuts. Losing weight is a true test of willpower. You face embarrassment and frustration. Surrender is as easy as sitting down with a pack of oreos and taking pity on yourself. I'm happy to say that I was able to push through the hardest part, and by the beginning of the fall semester I'd shrunk to 220 pounds. At around this time one of my best friends in the world got her Personal Trainer certification, and I've been happily with her program for nearly half a year now and now weigh less than I did my freshman year of high school.

The second substantial development was that, desperate for an idea of what I can do for my future, my family arranged for me to meet with a career counselor, a professional advisor for potentially wayward students who would help them make informed decisions on what their future goals may be and how to achieve them academically. I met with him almost completely defeated, unsure of what I wanted to do except that as time went on I saw it involving travel more and more. We talked for hours about what I could potentially do, and his laid back and friendly attitude helped put me at ease. After taking a few career interest assessments and proficiency tests he'd organized we came up with a long list of careers, and, much to my

surprise, my advisor said that the vast majority of those were achievable with an English degree. Though this was reassuring, what pushed me over was his confession to having been an English major himself. His experience wasn't entirely rosey, that he'd been through his ups and downs as far as employment was concerned, but at the time of my visit to his home for this assessment I can say that it was very apparent. My fears of inevitable poverty upon graduation with an English degree were unfounded. If I put in the work that wouldn't *have* to be a foregone conclusion.

And so I would finally able to put that little doubtful voice in the back of my head to bed. I just had to make sure I survived my semester with Cinema, Television, and Media. In all fairness, the major wasn't bad, but I knew it's not where my passions lied. However, that semester in particular allowed me to really expand upon my extracurricular activities. I'd been affiliated with the theater club here on campus since my freshman year, but I chose to take this semester to really go above and beyond and prove myself as an integral member of the club. I'd already directed a 10 Minute Play Festival and assistant directed a student written play, but now I was given full reign of the fall play *Of Good Stock.* I grabbed that bull by its horns and ran with it, determined to put on one Hell of a good show for the club. Without bias on my end, I can firmly say that I did just that. Not only was the play a financial success, but we raised nearly $300 for the American Cancer Society in the process. I also auditioned for the musical, something I never thought I'd do simply because I'd always been told that I didn't have a good voice. However, to my surprise I made it into the show and fell in love with the process. I love acting, and while it took me a *long* while to grow comfortable enough with both myself and my cast to sing and dance around them confidently, that process of growing out of my performers'

shell was a great experience to me. I also made sure to finally apply for the one on campus job that I'd wanted since my freshman career: Blood Drive Coordinator at the Community Outreach Center. I believe that blood drives are one the most important events that can be organized because by their very nature they will directly save lives. Ever since I've been 18 I have donated at every blood drive I've been eligible for here at Kutztown. After spending so long on the donating side, I wanted to test my organizational skills. I was floored when I was hired and even more-so when it was revealed just how positive these blood drives were doing. In my spring semester I was given an award by the Miller-Keystone Blood Center which acknowledged KU as being the #13 highest donating location in the entire area covered by Miller-Keystone with 276 units donated, or equating to somewhere around 500 lives saved.

And with that semester of personal growth behind me, it was time to leave CTM. I rejoined English and, just for good measure, threw in a German minor. I enjoyed getting back in the swing of English greatly, particularly with my History of the English Language class. I've always had an affinity for history, and while English history is not quite my specialty, I'd recently become far more acquainted with both German and Scandinavian history, and English history, at least before William the Bastard was made William the Conqueror in 1066, was a tennis match between the Germanic Saxons who adopted England as their home and their Scandinavian cousins who found it under-defended, fertile, and ripe for plunder and conquest. This class was certainly far more challenging than I'd originally thought. It was a combination between linguistics, history, and traditional English textual interpretation. Along with being able to analyze Chaucer and Beowulf I had to learn how to use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and tap into the German that I've been studying in order to truly get a handle on the

incredibly Germanic Old English language. This class proved to be a challenge in the best way as I had to exercise almost all of the academic muscles that my time at college thus far have developed in order to pass, and I can say that this class has been the most frustratingly rewarding experience I've had at this university since I arrived.

Now with my expanded German classes and near daily practice with a Language Partner and a German pen-pal of mine, my confidence and ability in this language has grown significantly, though I'll be the first to admit I'm far from perfect. This only seems natural as I am am becoming more and more drawn to Europe. The more I learn about Europe, the histories, cultures, and customs of its nations, the more desperate I'm becoming to go there. It's no over-exaggeration to say that this summer will be definitive for me, as I am going to visit Sweden and Denmark for two and a half weeks, and I am ridiculously excited to see this continent that has completely captured my imagination for the last two years of my life. If what I see is even a fraction of what I've hoped it was for so long I think I may have my new love presented to me on a silver platter. I want to see everything that this place can show me. I'm desperate to see it firsthand.

And this brings me into the paper that I've prepared for today. As I've mentioned previously, I am a history buff. I adore history in almost all of its forms. Museums are a second home to me, any place where I have the ability to gain some insight from those who've come before us, whether it's through admiring their successes, scrutinizing their failures, or even just observing how they lived their average day-to-day lives in order to get some understanding how those who came before would do it, I find it all fascinating. History and reading are my two great loves, and if I could spend the rest of my life studying either I would be a contented, happy man,

and if I got to do that all in the lands that occupy my daydreams I would say that that would be a heaven on Earth for me.

It's that desire to see this continent that seems so far away, so different and yet so familiar, that is beginning to guide how I want to pursue my life. There are some days where I find myself spending hours upon hours looking at graduate schools in Europe. Oslo University in Norway, Stockholm University in Sweden, Zurich University in Switzerland and the University of Hohenheim in Germany have all been the subjects of daydreams. I love the history of the continent, I love the languages, I love the cultures. I find myself desperate to be there. If I could spend every day for the rest of my life working to help preserve the history of this place that I find so fascinating, I think it would be a life fulfilled.

It's also these loves that push me towards "Trümmerliteratur," or Rubble Literature. Rubble Literature was a German literary genre that took root after the fall of the Third Reich in 1945, set in the ruins of an occupied Germany. After my first experience with it in my aforementioned German Classics in English Translation class, it largely dropped off of my radar. After all, though that class did give me a new appreciation of German, my interest in it specifically waned for a long time afterwards. However, it was after my interest in Europe was resparked and I re-acquainted myself with its tumultuous history that a question was brought to my mind, "If winners write the history, what do the losers get to write?" It was at this moment that I had vague memories of a play that opened with a burping Death and a sobbing God and a river that quite literally spat out a soldier. I approached my old professor who taught that play and she reminded me of its name and I just knew I had to examine this genre.

And with that, I have prepared this paper which focuses on two particular works from the genre of Trümmerliteratur. The first is the relatively short poem by Günter Eich, “Inventur,” or “Inventory.” The second piece is the play *Draußen vor der Tür,* or *The Man Outside* by Wolfgang Borchert. Through these two plays, we will see how the immense pain and suffering towards the German people, how the complete loss of their sovereignty through their occupation by four separate powers, and how being forced to come face-to-face with the atrocities committed by their regime forces them to reexamine their place in Europe.

Trümmerliteratur: The Shift In German Consciousness After Loss In the Second World War

For as much as I love Germany and its culture, it is probably fortunate that in the history of the world there have been few countries as destructive as Germany once was. Being the loser in two of the largest wars in the history of the world, and in at least one of those being the primary instigator, the world could not abide many nations that were as militaristic as early 20th Century Germany. This destructive nature should come as no surprise, given how its founder, Otto von Bismarck, famously declared Germany would be formed of "Iron and Blood" ("Excerpt from Bismarck's 'Blood and Iron' Speech (1862)"). Only within the last 70 years has Germany dropped its absolute monarchist, totalitarian dictatorial tendencies in place for the friendly democracy we know and love today. And that is the change that I want to focus on. Germany was arguably the last conquered nation of Europe. I will examine the German Trümmerliteratur with the intent of showing how they capture the feelings of the German people after the calamity that was their defeat in the Second World War. The pieces I want to examine are Günter Eich's "Inventur" and Wolfgang Borchert's *Draußen vor der Tür.* These pieces are the confession of a nation imprisoned for its crimes, its attempts to come to grips with both its loss, its loss of stature on the world stage, and the countless atrocities committed on its behalf. These pieces deal not only with the Germany's loss to the Allies, but also what they lost *in* this war. It's discussing those themes of loss that will reveal in both these pieces how the trajectory of Germany will change, and how it will transition from totalitarianism to democracy.

I don't believe it's too much of a stretch to say that World War 2 is a topic that most of us are familiar with. It is, after all, the most recent total war in Western History. In the annals of

historical tyrants and potential world-conquerors, Adolf Hitler's Third Reich stand out as particularly hated, and for good reason. In his book *Atrocities: The 100 Deadliest Episodes in Human History*, Matthew White ranks World War 2 as the number one deadliest conflict in the entire history of humanity, having claimed the lives of "66 million (20 million soldier and 46 million civilians)" (400). While it is usually an oversimplification to relegate nations into "good guys" and "bad guys" in something as complicated as war, causing such a conflict on unmistakably racial grounds by declaring "he [Hitler] had defined these [war aims] as the securing of Lebensraum and destruction of Jewish-Bolshevism, a war for German survival had to be fought by any and all means" (Fritz, 125).

That kind of war justification is not something that can be explained away. For as complicated as the geopolitics of the time were, these are unmistakably evil goals. The very definition of *lebensraum* according to Merriam Webster is "territory believed especially by Nazis to be necessary for national existence or economic self-sufficiency." This policy not only encourages but is *dependent* on expansionism, on conquering new nations and removing local populations through violence. During the Invasion of Poland the *Wehrmacht* deliberately targeted Polish civilians and refugees, "...the Luftwaffe deliberately bombs civilian targets. Those who evade the bombs are strafed and mowed down by the machine guns of the attacking planes" (World War Two, 11:43-11:52). Following the initial invasion, the Poles suffered immensely under Nazi occupation, according to the video "The Fallen of World War II" in which it's stated "When you combine military and civilian deaths over 16% of the total Polish population died in World War 2, which is the highest percentage of any country" (Halloran, 9:36-9:45). The Polish situation is worth examining because they were occupied by the Nazis

almost since the beginning. They were a military nonentity for the vast majority of the war, yet nearly one in five Poles lost their lives. If that sheer amount of brutality doesn't expose the evils of the Nazi regime and the cruelty that *lebensraum* would have inflicted across the conquered Eastern European peoples I don't know what will.

Yet the Germans did not simply give during the war. For all the violence they inflicted upon others they suffered incredibly in the fighting as well. The following two figures, both taken from Matthew White's *Atrocities* perhaps best illustrate the magnitude of the war. The first shows nearly 4 million German soldiers were killed in the fighting, the second shows two million German noncombatants died, 1.5 million civilians and 0.6 million POWs (White, 417 & 419).

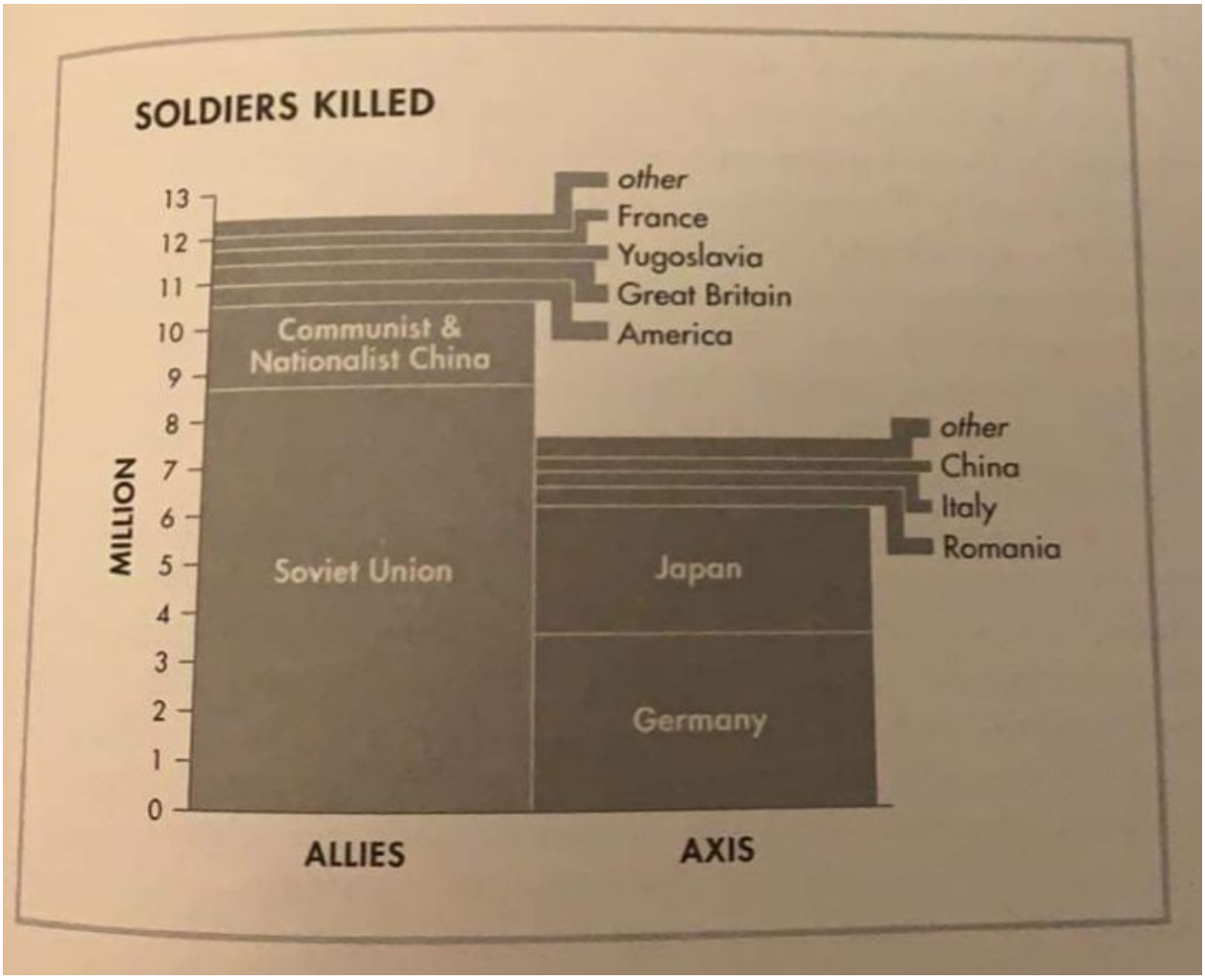
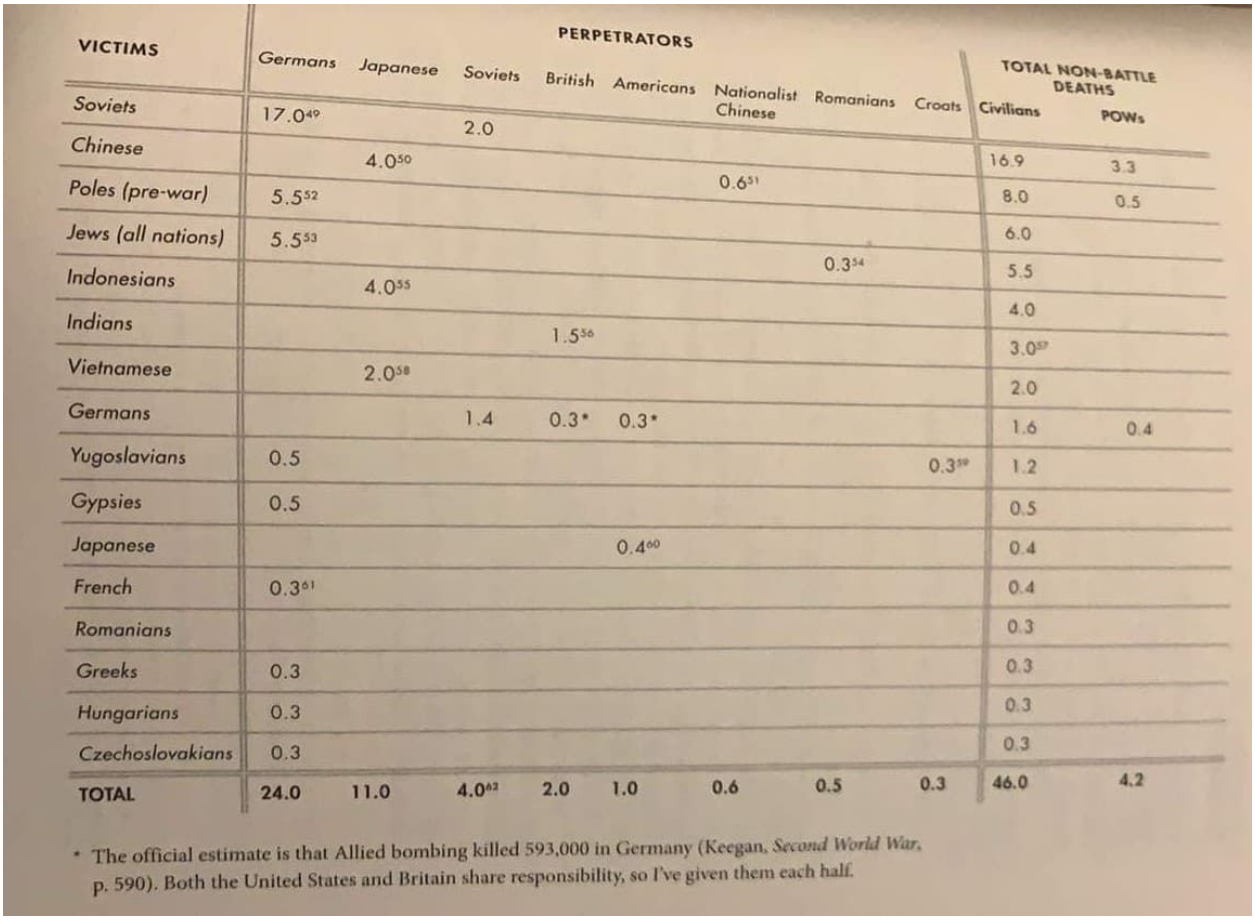


Fig. 1



VICTIMS	PERPETRATORS								TOTAL NON-BATTLE DEATHS	
	Germans	Japanese	Soviets	British	Americans	Nationalist Chinese	Romanians	Croats	Civilians	POWs
Soviets	17.0[49]		2.0						16.9	3.3
Chinese		4.0[50]				0.6[51]			8.0	0.5
Poles (pre-war)	5.5[52]								6.0	
Jews (all nations)	5.5[53]						0.3[54]		5.5	
Indonesians		4.0[55]							4.0	
Indians				1.5[56]					3.0[57]	
Vietnamese		2.0[58]							2.0	
Germans			1.4	0.3*	0.3*				1.6	0.4
Yugoslavians	0.5							0.3[59]	1.2	
Gypsies	0.5								0.5	
Japanese					0.4[60]				0.4	
French	0.3[61]								0.4	
Romanians									0.3	
Greeks	0.3								0.3	
Hungarians	0.3								0.3	
Czechoslovakians	0.3								0.3	
TOTAL	24.0	11.0	4.0[62]	2.0	1.0	0.6	0.5	0.3	46.0	4.2

* The official estimate is that Allied bombing killed 593,000 in Germany (Keegan, *Second World War*, p. 590). Both the United States and Britain share responsibility, so I've given them each half.

Fig. 2

Yet the mass deaths of Germans didn't end with the war, as in the two years following, White lists "The Expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe" as having claimed another "2.1 million lives," making it number 36 in his ranking system for deadliest human events in history (White, 422). When all was said and done, when the Second World War was finished and all ethnic Germans had been forced into the new postwar borders for Germany, 8 million Germans were dead. Killed by firebombing, killed by the Soviet invasion, killed in combat or in their beds,

killed through starvation or through cold or through sexual violence. The Germans forced great suffering upon nearly the whole of Europe, but let it be known that they certainly didn't escape unscathed themselves.

And this is the Germany that will be examined in these works. A Germany that has committed atrocities and had atrocities committed against it. A Germany that has thoroughly had its back broken by war. A Germany smaller and more tightly packed than ever. A Germany whose hopes for world conquest were dashed. A Germany bathed in blood for its wrongdoing. A Germany conquered. A Germany of ruins. A Germany of rubble.

Firstly, I want to examine Eich's poem "Inventory." However, in order for us to truly examine this poem, we must first learn about its writer, Günter Eich. Eich had risen to prominence in Germany by writing radio plays. Eich clearly loved this medium, stating "'I perceive the world through the ear rather than through the eye" (Vieregg, "The Spanner In The Works"). Eich grew to prominence through his radio plays, though he was a renowned poet and a founding member of the literary group "Gruppe 47." Eich clearly had a passion for his work and wrote prolifically both before and after World War 2. He moved to postwar Austria and lived there in peace until his death in the 1970s.

However, what is surprising is that Eich, after his death, was revealed to be somewhat more controversial than one would originally assume. As stated by Axel Vieregg, "Eich had indeed been 'oil in the machinery' of Hitler's Third Reich" ("The Spanner In The Works"). Vieregg goes on to explain "He [Eich] was no follower of the regime, but, as the title of [Glenn R.] Cuomo's investigation *Career at the Cost of Compromise* suggests and his investigation then shows, had certainly not sung songs 'which go against expectations'" ("The Spanner In The

Works"). Eich didn't stop writing during the time of the Third Reich. In fact, he was an incredibly busy playwright during the time of the Third Reich (Vieregg, "The Spanner In The Works"). He later became a soldier and was captured by Allied forces. With all that being said, Eich likely was not as much of a sympathizer as he was just protecting his own skin. It should come as no great shock that the Nazis didn't have much tolerance for differing opinions, and they had no problems whatsoever with extrajudicial violence targeted towards their critics. After all, after Hitler was appointed Chancellor one of the Nazis' first power consolidations was the infamous massacre during "The Night of the Long Knives," which likely killed hundreds of people (Larson, 314). While it is easy to sit upon a pedestal today and pass judgement on Eich, who went along with the regime and wrote "over 160 contributions to the to the Nazi broadcasting system," the issue is far more complex (Vieregg, "The Spanner In The Works"). With the threat of violence so omnipresent in Nazi Germany, I think that while we can say that it was not morally right of Eich to have stood by, the threat to his life that would have been created by any deviation from Nazi ideology is a deterrent that many of us could relate to.

With that background on Eich covered, let's begin our analysis of "Inventory." Eich's poem is written from the point of view of an ex German soldier in postwar Germany. He is speaking to the audience, listing to us all of his worldly possessions, which are ridiculously minor.

Some field rations:
my dish, my tumbler,
here in the tin-plate

I've scratched my name.
Scratched it here with this
precious nail
I keep concealed
from coveting eyes. (Eich, "Inventory")

The aftermath of this war has clearly taken a toll on the Narrator. He has returned to a city with only what he carries, returning to a world where everything has been crushed and destroyed by the war, everything to him has taken on a new value, or lack thereof. This nail clearly holds some special value for the Narrator, however it goes to show how completely morphed his ideas of value have become after the war. Why would this nail be coveted by anyone without some sentimental attachment to it? The answer is it's not, but after losing everything he needs to cherish something as though it were still valuable instead of admitting that he's been left with quite literally only what he can carry and the clothes on his back.

However, despite how willing he seems to be to share his account of his possessions with us, there's an odd break from telling us plainly what he has into being somewhat more cryptic.

In the bread bag I have a
a pair of wool socks
and a few things that I
discuss with no one, (Eich, "Inventory")

What doesn't the Narrator discuss with anyone? He never even alludes to that line again throughout the rest of the poem. One could take many different interpretations, however, if we are keeping this poem in a literal sense, it may be Nazi paraphernalia, which would explain his reluctance to speak with anyone about it. At this time after the war the atrocities in the concentration camps have been brought fully into the light and it was not uncommon for former Nazis to be executed by gangs of vigilantes or occupying soldiers (if this man was unfortunate enough to be in the Soviet zone). As we've seen already, violence against ethnic Germans, especially in Eastern Europe, would last for years after the war's conclusion. Being an ex soldier, especially an officer, could easily get him killed.

And how does the Narrator deal with this world he's been left? Well, he himself states:

> The pencil's the thing
> I love the most.
> By day it writes verses
> I make up at night. (Eich, "Inventory")

This helps to show the impact that writing had on the Narrator. He doesn't pretend as though nights are easy for him, as he himself states that he stays up making verses instead of sleeping. He cherishes that little tool because it helps him hold on to a possession that he clearly cherishes; his voice.

For as tempting as it is to apply this poem literally to a singular narrator, a single, definable character, it should be mentioned that this poem functions just as well as a

representation for the whole of postwar Germany as it does the confessions of a single soldier. Following the war, it's needless to say that Germany was incredibly poor, as is the Narrator. The Narrator has lost so much that he considers a nail to be sacred and worth keeping out of sight, and Germany likewise had been so economically tanked as one would expect from a nation being occupied by four other powers. They lost their wealth. They lost their privileged standing on the world stage. They lost national pride. They lost innocence.

However, the German people didn't lose everything. They did not lose their voices. They will use those to tell the world what they've lost and what meager things they have left, as the Narrator has done in "Inventory." They will use those voices to say what they must to help them heal and to help them. They will use those voices to help reconnect Germany to the world stage as a respectable and genuine nation.

And it is with those voices that the German people will reclaim their independent thought for themselves. The way the Nazis would run the masses of German was "*Menschenführung*, which means literally 'guidance of men' and may be freely translated as government through the people despite the people. Clearly, the nature of leadership or guidance depends on the leader, his goals, and the opinions of the people he leads" (Speier, 361). Needless to say, but this method of governance wasn't conducive to free thought. The people didn't have a say, and ultimately why should they? Their glorious leader knew best, he was going to lead them to salvation! He was going to lead them where they needed to go.

It's that dependence on a single figure that made fascism in Germany so able to thrive. The German people largely accepted this singular governing body and did what it asked with no questions. They were going to fix everything! All that was necessary was faith in the process. It

is that very train of thought that finds itself so antithetical to the democratic process. After all, democracy is literally meant to be a choice. Choice is impossible to come across in a society where all the voices regarding the government must be in complete agreement or run the risk of being brutally suppressed.

It's the reclamation of the individual German voice as evidenced in "Inventory" that helps transition the Germans away from their inclinations towards a dictator and more towards a democratic formula. The Narrator in "Inventory" is only running down his possessions, sure, but it's his most prized possession, his pencil on which he writes his poetry, that shows that he has room for tremendous advancement. This shift is certainly a minor one. After all, this poem sees the Germans learning to use their voices again by listing their possessions but not yet being ready to discuss openly what they did. However, it is the willingness to go forward and to continue to work on their voices each night like the Narrator will that shows that the Germans will earn their voices and, not long after, their vote.

With that, it is time to move on to the other piece that I will be discussing, Wolfgang Borchert's *The Man Outside.* In order to get a handle on *The Man Outside's* cynical and uncaring attitude, a brief examination of Wolfgang Borchert is in order. When he was twenty he was conscripted into the German army where he was sent to the vicious Eastern Front to fight the Russians. During that time, he was arrested and sentenced to death by the Nazi regime. His crime? "...plain speaking in private letters. His sentence was commuted because of his youth" (Spender, xi). Borchert survived another tour of duty against the Soviet war machine, but he wasn't long for the world after. "After the war he had small positions in theaters and cabarets for

a few months, but his health was ruined and from the end of 1945 until his death two years later, he was in bed with some fever resembling malaria" (Spender, xi).

His play *The Man Outside,* or *Draußen vor der Tür* in his native German, is fraught with the same kind of tragedy that seemed to surround Germany as a whole and Borchert specifically. It had its start as a radio play, but "*The stage version, in Wolfgang Libeneiner's production, had its première at the Hamburg Kammerspiele on 21st November, 1947, one day after the author's death"* (78). Borchert never got to see this play on the stage, though he did get to hear its broadcast as a radio play from the Allies.

For as tragic as Borchert's death before his play's stage premiere, it only seems to be fitting for the play as it revolves in tragedy and uncomfort. Borchert's subtitle is quite literally "*A play which no theatre will produce and no public will want to see.*" (77). Borchert seemed to have written the play under the assumption that the German public would not want to see something that would prove to be so melancholic and harsh. This serves two purposes. The first is that it helps set the tone, even before the story gets underway, that this is going to be an uncomfortable experience and it would be something that many Germans may find too difficult to get through. The second purpose is it serves as a bit of an indicator on what Borchert thought of German society at the time. With just that subtitle he seemed to be under the impression that Germans will not want theater that will force them to come face-to-face with painful incidents so fresh in their memory, especially given the totally destructive nature of the war, but instead that he feels that they would prefer escapism, something less harsh and less critical of both the German people and the culture that got them into the tragedy that was the Second World War in

the first place. Despite what he felt the German people may want, however, Borchert delivered this masterpiece instead.

A man comes to Germany. With that we will address our main character, Beckmann. Before the play begins, Borchert describes Beckmann. “Outwardly, he is is a near relation of those figures which stand in fields to scare birds - and sometimes in the evening, people too. Inwardly - the same. He has waited outside in the cold for a thousand days. And as entrance fee he’s paid with his knee-caps. And after waiting outside in the cold for a thousand nights, he actually - finally - comes home” (Borchert, 82). This gives us an idea of who Beckmann as a person is before we even see him. He’s emaciated from his thousand days and nights in the cold captivity of Siberia and emotionally quite hollow for much the same reason, though there is another serious reason we will see later. He’s been seriously wounded in the knees and so has lost much of his mobility.

We get an insight into how desperate a state Beckmann is in when the show literally opens with his silhouette falling into the Elbe River. In the following scene, entitled “The Dream,” Beckmann is confronted by an angry Elbe who demands to know what Beckmann thinks he’s doing in her.

ELBE. ...What do you want here?

BECKMANN. Sleep. Up above I can’t stick it any longer. I’m through. I want to sleep - to be dead. Be dead for life. And to sleep - to sleep in peace at last. To sleep for ten thousand nights.

ELBE. … What can’t you cope with, you greybeard?

> BECKMANN. Everything. There's nothing up above I can cope with now. I can't starve any more. I can't limp any more and stand by my bed and then limp out of the house again because the bed's occupied. My leg, my bed, my food - I can't cope with it any longer, d'you hear? (Borchert, 86).

The river ultimately coughs Beckmann up, but she does it with no sympathy, no kind or gentle words for Beckmann, but instead she ushers him up onto dry land with "You snotty-nosed little suicide. No, d'you hear? Do you really suppose that because your wife won't play with you anymore, because you've a limp and your stomach rumbles, that entitles you to creep in here under my skirts" (Borchert, 87). Beckmann, who has returned from the war in what is very understandably an emotionally fragile state of mind has been turned out of his bed because it is "occupied." Beckmann has been through the ringer but he gets no sympathy.

Beckmann meets The Other One, a character who is described as "no one at all" in the character list towards the beginning of the play (Borchert, 81). The Other One seems to be a figment of Beckmann's imagination, an amalgamation of everyone Beckmann has ever seen, and as a result The Other One proves to be the voice of optimism and perseverance whenever Beckmann hits a wall. And the structure of the play is fairly straightforward from here one out: Beckmann goes somewhere to look for help is involved in some confrontation, is cast out and starts back towards the Elbe where he is confronted by The Other One who does his best to convince him to move forward along the road and keep knocking on the doors of life. As a result, this play's structure is very noticeable and predictable, which is the point. The life in postwar Germany was a relatively simple one, not one that was going to have an exceedingly large number of deviations. We follow Beckmann through this broken world, and how we see how the

combination of his experiences in the war and the coldness of his home are pushing him closer and closer to the edge.

What seems to be the most common through-line of the play aside from its structure is that Beckmann can't seem to get any sympathy. Aside from The Other One and the first person Beckmann meets after being coughed out of the Elbe, the Girl, Beckmann seems to be more of a cabaret attraction. He is mocked for his melancholic demeanor. Beckmann's thin frame, sad face, strange haircut and limp often prove to be objects of derision. However, the most common source of ridicule throughout the entire play, the one in which there is literally not a scene without them being made mention, are his glasses, which Beckmann describes as "[having] grey lead rims round the lenses. And then these grey bands that you fix round your ears. And this other grey band right across the nose! You get a sort of grey standardized face" (Borchert, 92).

Beckmann's peculiar glasses are helpfully explained by the character of the Colonel as being "so-called respirator glasses, my dear. Introduced into the armed forces in 1934 for personnel with bad eyesight, to be worn under the respirator" (Borchert, 97). Beckmann is constantly ridiculed for these strange glasses, from the Girl who does it playfully to the Colonel and his family to the Producer to old Frau Kramer. Beckmann is forced to constantly explain that he doesn't have any spare glasses and that these were the only ones he was able to save from the war. Beckmann carries so many burdens from the war, from his emaciation, his ridiculous haircut and his crippled leg. However, it is always the glasses that seem to attract the most mocking from those around him.

The Other One would contest Beckmann's claim that those glasses make things clearer when he states "You see everything through your respirator glasses. You see everything

distorted, Beckmann. Pay no attention" (Borchert, 117). Beckmann may very well be blind without his glasses, but that doesn't mean that they offer him clearly. Beckmann is forced to constantly be looking through a lens of war, and it is that viewpoint that so many find hilariously odd. Almost all of the other characters who Beckmann comes in contact with seem to have almost put the war behind them or are very well in the process of just that thing. Beckmann's wife left him for a man who was at home. The Girl who fished Beckmann out of the Elbe tried to put her husband behind her when she admits he was "Starved, frozen, killed, how should I know? He was missing since Stalingrad. That's three years ago" (Borchert, 93). Beckmann's old Colonel is living comfortably at home with his family after having spent his tenure as a Soviet prisoner "put on civvies and ate caviare" (Borchert, 98). The Cabaret Producer tells Beckmann, a veteran of Stalingrad, one of, if not *the* bloodiest battle in human history, to "mature on the battlefield of life" (Borchert, 108). Frau Kramer, when discussing the suicides of Beckmann's parents, jokingly refers to it as "denazification" (Borchert, 116). However, because of all the baggage Beckmann carries, and because his glasses are literally a remnant from the war, he is forced to not only take its scars with him, but to constantly see the world through the lens of the war that is over. It's truly a tragedy that Beckmann is unable to get the help he needs to see the world through a different light. After all, for as much as everyone else seems to enjoy mocking him, no one save the Girl by the river lifts a finger to help Beckmann see things from a new light. However, it's the Girl's brand of help that ends up ultimately pushing Beckmann away. She takes away his silly glasses, stating "It's quite a good thing for you to see everything a bit blurred for one evening" (Borchert, 93). The Girl is asking Beckmann to trust her for one evening, to trust that things don't need to be entirely clear, just that they might be safe and comfortable

together away from the burdens that he carries, but it's Beckmann's fear of being lost without his glasses for even a night that leads him to beg the Girl to give him his glasses back. He is unable to trust her and falls back on his military identity for a hope of clarity.

Beckmann is in a uniquely vulnerable position, as he does ask for help constantly throughout the play. He asks the Colonel to take responsibility for the lives that were lost under Beckmann's watch. He asks the Cabaret Producer for a pair of his glasses or to let him perform in order to feed himself. He asks Frau Kramer to help him find his parents. However, Beckmann never gets the help he truly asks for. The Colonel calls Beckmann a comedian and offers him a suit to "make yourself human" (Borchert, 104). The Producer refuses to give Beckmann a pair of his glasses, stating "I can't spare a single pair of them. All my ideas, my effect, my moods depend on them" (Borchert, 107). Then, when Beckmann asks to be allowed to perform after the Producer was stating that Germany needed young, radical performers, the Producer "...would like to be brave, but prefers to be cowardly after all" (Borchert, 81). "I'm hungry! I've got to work" is Beckmann's cry to the Producer, who is explained to be turning down Beckmann from his cabaret not because Beckmann is not a good performer, but because the Producer is afraid that Beckmann's cover of "Tapfere Kleine Soldatenfrau" with lyrics concerning Beckmann's wife's adultery would upset his audience and make the cabaret less popular (Borchert, 111). And Frau Kramer, when asked by Beckmann where his family is, responds "Chapel 5 at Ohlsdorf. Do you know what Ohlsdorf is? It's a burial ground" (Borchert, 115). The old Frau Kramer then goes on to explain to Beckmann that his parents committed suicide by turning on their gas mains, lamenting "with all that gas we could've done a month's cooking" (Borchert, 116).

Frau Kramer's coldness initially comes off as almost comically insensitive. After all, Beckmann just wanted to go home and he's greeted with this woman's callousness in regards to his dead family. While it's hard for me to defend Frau Kramer's condescending attitude towards Beckmann because of all that we've seen Beckmann go through in the play and the suffering we will very shortly find out that he went through before its beginning, Frau Kramer's distaste towards Beckmann's parents is certainly not unwarranted. "Why does an old man like him want to wear uniform? And he was a bit hot on the Jews, you know that, don't you, as his son? Your old man couldn't stomach the Jews" (Borchert, 115) is how she describes Beckmann's father, with a particularly sour taste in her mouth. Borchert does not put in any particular stage directions that would tell us what it seems as though Beckmann would be feeling in this particular moment. He may have been complicit or even in agreement of his parents' radical conservatism. Maybe he was more liberal than his parents. Maybe after having spent three years in a Soviet POW camp Beckmann is fairly apolitical at the moment. That all being said, in the moment, I don't believe that it matters what Beckmann's thoughts on his parents were. Beckmann was alone. Whether or not his parents deserved to die because of the radicalism of their views or their actions is a moot point in that very moment. With Kramer's revelation, Beckmann has been left orphaned. And all she could think about was the gas.

The play ends with Beckmann telling Frau Kramer to close her door and passing out after a long argument with The Other One. While asleep and dying from exposure, Beckmann dreams he's confronting to all the characters in the play, including God, whom he angrily rails against when he says "When exactly are you dear, dear God? Were you dear when you let my little son, my little son, who was just a year old, be torn to pieces by a screaming bomb? Were you dear,

dear God, when you had him murdered" (Borchert, 121)? God only responds by claiming that humanity has turned its back to him and so he has no power in this world anymore. Eventually, Beckmann wakes up from his sleep, and, realizing he's dead, narrates his own death to the audience.

So with this long character analysis of Beckmann behind us, what does he represent? Well, Beckmann's story as a whole shows that no one is blameless. Each character Beckmann comes across is deeply flawed and hurts others with the only real exceptions being the One-Legged Man, The Other One, and the Elbe. The Girl hurts her husband by taking Beckmann into her home and dressing him in her Husband's clothes, giving the impression that he's been replaced, though I don't believe anyone would argue that she had anything but good intentions as she'd rescued Beckmann from freezing on the bank of the Elbe. The Colonel mocks Beckmann for his PTSD and, though he does offer Beckmann a change of clothes, he doesn't understand Beckmann's suffering and finds it easier to insult him rather than trying to empathize with him. The Cabaret Producer "bravely" proclaims that he wants to bring truth into the theater, but when Beckmann offers him an ugly truth he ultimately backs off and decides not to risk upsetting his clientele. Frau Kramer chooses to patronize Beckmann and be more upset about the loss of gas than the loss of two human lives due to suicide.

However, for as flawed and as cruel as the characters around Beckmann is, the end of the play when Beckmann is confronting all the characters for one final time, he is confronted by the One-Legged Man. We were meant to fear him initially. He is described as a giant. He emerged from the darkness. He angrily mumbled Beckmann's name over and over and over again. He seemed like a vicious brute who may attack our small, frail protagonist. However, Beckmann

does not confront the One-Legged Man as much as the One-Legged Man confronts Beckmann, and what he has to say is not a glowing endorsement to the moral purity of our protagonist.

> Yes, you have [committed murder], Beckmann. We are murdered each day and each day we commit murder. You murdered me, Beckmann! Have you forgotten already? I was three years in Siberia, Beckmann, and yesterday I wanted to go home. But my place was taken - you were there, Beckmann, in my place. So I went into the Elbe, Beckmann, yesterday evening. Where else should I go, Beckmann, eh? The Elbe was cold and wet. But I'm used to it now, now I'm dead. That you should have forgotten so quickly, Beckmann! One doesn't forget murder as fast as that. It runs after you, Beckmann. Yes, I made a mistake. I should not have come home. There was no place for me at home, Beckmann, for you were there. (Borchert, 133).

The One-Legged Man's confrontation towards Beckmann shows that the lines of who does good and bad in this world are blurred. As we followed Beckmann throughout the course of this play we see that he has never intentionally done anyone wrong. His being responsible for the death of the One-Legged Man, who dreamt of his beloved "for a thousand nights" was not his intention or even something that happened through neglect on his part (Borchert, 81). It just so happened to be an incredibly unfortunate coincidence that the Girl happened to be the one to fish Beckmann out of the river and take him back home on the same night that her husband was to be returning. And even when Beckmann had justification to be cruel to Frau Kramer after the heartless way in which she broke the news of his parents' death to him, he asked her to shut her door instead of confronting her face to face.

The only character that Beckmann confronts regularly before his final dream is The Other One. This should come as no surprise, as The Other One has positioned himself as the rival to Beckmann's goal of going back to the Elbe at the first sign of trouble. Beckmann in his anger towards this mysterious figure, slings that terrible, unthinkable pejorative "optimist" at The Other One any chance he gets. The Other One, for his part, however, is an optimist. He is a being that is convinced in the inherent goodness of humanity, something that even God Himself seems incapable of doing throughout this play. The Other One's worldview and what he truly represents, and his opposition by Beckmann, are perfectly summed up in this following dialogue exchange:

> THE OTHER. … There *was* a time, Beckmann, when people reading the evening newspaper in the green-shaded light of Cape Town sighed for two girls frozen to death in the ice of Alaska. There was a time when they couldn't sleep in Hamburg because a child in Boston had been kidnapped. There was a time when it could happen that they mourned in San Francisco if a balloonist crashed in Paris.
>
> BECKMANN. There *was* a time, there *was,* there *was! When* was it? Ten thousand years ago? It takes casualty lists with six naughts to do it now. (Borchert, 117-118)

The Other One and Beckmann are foils for each other in so much as The Other One remembers and truly seems to live in the past, a past of peace and a past where the simple bond of humanity was enough for people to share empathy for each other. Beckmann shows his ruthless pessimism here where he seems to imply that he doesn't believe that humanity will ever achieve such a degree of togetherness ever again. The Other One is named so because unlike Beckmann, who is "one of the many" who has had his faith in humanity utterly destroyed by the preceding six years

of carnage (Borchert, 81). Beckmann and the other veterans, the other Germans, do not believe in the goodness of humanity because not only have they performed evil to vast multitudes of others, but they have had evil in turn performed on themselves. The Other One represents the collective spirit of that faith in humanity. And given his disappearing acts whenever Beckmann tries to interact with another character and his generally mysterious nature, that's exactly what he is. A spirit.

And Beckmann is the living embodiment of the loss of that spirit. The Other One followed Beckmann faithfully throughout this play, acting as a guide to keep Beckmann safe. When Beckmann passes out in the street, when he makes the ultimate decision to give up and go through the door that's always open for him, death's door he loses everything. True, he loses his suffering, but he also lost the future that The Other One promised him. He lost the hope for redemption after the One-Legged Man named him as his killer. He lost any hope to be with the Girl. But, perhaps worst of all, he lost that spirit of hope in humanity that The Other One brought with him. In Beckmann's last monologue, where he faces the unknown of death by himself, he asks for The Other One: "Where are you now, optimist? Now answer me! Now I need you, Answerer! Where are you? You're suddenly not there! Where are you, Answerer, where are you, you who grudged my death? Where is the old man who calls himself God" (Borchert, 135)?

So how does this play help push Germany away from its totalitarian roots and towards a brighter future? The answer is simple: Eich's poem encouraged Germans to relearn their own voices but not addressing the darker aspects of what was going on, while *The Man Outside* was about as hard a kick in the face any work could be. It didn't shy away from any of the contentious points seen in Germany and it addressed those losses honestly. Borchert was ripping

off a social bandaid. He was forcing the Germans to acknowledge the awfulness of their situation head on. Though at first glance it seems that Beckmann's suicide may be averse to any message of hope, what this play functions as is a warning against being like a Beckmann. It encourages the German people to not give up. Each of them have done things that they are not proud of. "We are murdered each day and each day we commit murder" is a hard truth that will show the German people that their actions have consequences, even now as a defeated nation (Borchert, 133). However, this does not mean to give up, for as long as they are alive, even if God has turned His back on them, even if other Germans have turned their back on them, common humanity still binds them. And it is that common humanity, that interconnectedness, that is the strongest case against totalitarianism and the strongest towards democracy that could be made.

Trümmerliteratur is a genre that, by its very definition, is forced to deal in the ugly nature of humanity. After all, it was created in the wake of the bloodiest conflict in human history. It was a genre of literature written by a defeated people who fought for an abysmal lost cause who were forced to acknowledge the evils that they'd been ignoring within their own borders, who were forced to face the death that was now on their own doorstep. They lost everything.

And that is what makes Trümmerliteratur great. It is a genre that focuses on and deals rawly on the topic of loss, a topic every German would know about. It is a genre that, by asking its readers and writers to look at it honestly, to look at the world of rubble and ruin of at least partially their own design, powerful scenes can be created. This is a genre that I find powerful and deeply important because we see that this people who were once ruled by a regime millions of people rightly feel was the embodiment of evil, through their loss were forced into introspection, and that introspection pushed them on a righteous path. If Germany can change,

any nation can change. Trümmerliteratur, through documenting their loss, helps us see that transition from a dictatorship with unarguably evil intentions into a modern day democracy and a pillar of the international community. By tracking that shift in feeling, we see how the course to peace can be secured in the future.

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