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More than Just a Business: Recasting Literary Publishing in Postwar Germany, 1945–1949

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Like other creative industries emerging in mid-1945 from 12 years of Nazi rule, including six years of war, German publishing was ideologically suspect, internationally isolated, and insular. By the 1950s, however, the book trade in the two German successor states was once again varied and vibrant. And it was also tightly integrated into the international publishing business, within which it had become an increasingly active and important presence. This article analyzes the development of the German book publishing industry during the Allied occupation, 1945–1949, through the lens of knowledge transfer. It was a time during which capital-starved German publishers harnessed the political and ideological objectives of the occupiers and their prewar contacts to achieve their own commercial and cultural ambitions, including taking initial steps toward internationalization. The focus is on literary fiction, a genre that constituted a minority of all published output in the postwar period, but which also included all top bestsellers. Literature in translation, moreover, accounted for a substantial proportion of those bestselling books, and at the same time represented a key vehicle for internationalization. Two case studies, one drawn from the Soviet zone of occupation, the later East Germany, and one from the western zones that came to be dominated by the Americans, the later West Germany, illustrate two different, yet remarkably similar paths through which this interplay of ideological alignment and commerce played out among a range of actors and laid the basis for the subsequent development of the industry.

Keywords: creative industries; business-government relations; knowledge transfer; internationalisation

The mass book burning in Berlin in May 1933, not long after the Nazi seizure of power, is one of the most evocative images from the “peacetime” period of National Socialism. The Nazis’ attempt to exorcise non-“Aryan” ideas by incinerating the books that contained them

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epitomized the regime's fixation with the written word. In the years that followed, this fixation continued in other guises, including censorship, book banning, and reorganization of the German publishing industry, largely along ideological lines. As a consequence, like other creative industries, such as film, radio, and jazz music,¹ that emerged in mid-1945 after twelve years of Nazi rule, including six years of war, German publishing was ideologically suspect, internationally isolated, and insular. When the Allied occupation of Germany began, furthermore, the industry faced desperate shortages of paper and capital and was severely constrained by the policies of the occupiers. Nevertheless, by the 1950s, the book trade in the two German successor states was once again varied and vibrant. And German publishing in the two successor states had also become tightly integrated into the international book trade, within which German-based publishers exercised an increasingly commanding presence.

How did this remarkable transformation occur? This article traces the interplay of political, cultural, and commercial interests—both on the sides of the Allies and of the Germans—that enabled it. In particular, it highlights the role of German publishers in overcoming bureaucratic, material, and capital constraints to build their businesses through mobilization of pre-1933 practices and connections, which, in turn, allowed close alignment with the interests and objectives of the occupiers. Essentially, re-education of the German reading public to promote different values in the post-Nazi period formed the common ground between the occupiers and members of the German publishing community, leading to a strategy of internationalization of the content of books published in the German area.

The main vehicle for this was literary fiction, a genre that constituted a minority of all published output in the postwar period but which included *all* the top bestsellers. Literature in translation, moreover, accounted for a substantial proportion of bestselling books and, at the same time, represented a key means of internationalizing content. Two case studies, one drawn from the Soviet zone of occupation (the later East Germany) and one from the western zones that came to be dominated by the Americans (the later West Germany), illustrate two different yet remarkably similar paths through which this interplay of ideological alignment and commerce led to business growth and reconnection with the international publishing industry.²

Recent business historical literature on the publishing industry has focused on case studies that emphasize the role of knowledge accumulation within firms and/or family firm dynamics as the basis for growth and internationalization,³ whereas the main overview works on postwar German publishing that deal only briefly with the occupation period and do not address the role of translation or the re-establishment of international connections.⁴ In contrast, this article contends that the recasting, reorientation, and resurgence of the book trade in the German area in the immediate postwar period are best understood as a function of international knowledge transfer akin to, but not the same as, technology transfer. As such,

1. See, for instance, Phillips, "The Nazi Control of the German Film Industry"; Kater, "Forbidden Fruit?"; Tworek, *News from Germany*; Marsh, "Inside the Third Reich's Radio."

2. For bestsellers and translations among them in the postwar Germanies, see list in Christian Adam's database, "Top100 post-war 45-61 C Adam," accessed January 21, 2024. <http://www.christian-adam.net/index.php/bestsellerforschung>.

3. See, for instance, van Lente and de Goey, "Trajectories of Internationalization"; Moya, "A Family-Owned Publishing Multinational"; Berghoff, "Blending Personal and Managerial Capitalism."

4. Adam, *Der Traum vom Jahre Null*; Frohn, *Literaturaustausch im geteilten Deutschland*.

it highlights a fundamental—and early—component of international interconnection in creative industries such as book publishing: the international ownership of and trade in rights, where rights involve not things but ideas and intangible content.⁵

The focus in this article on literary publishing in translation, moreover, provides yet another new perspective on processes of business strategy and growth in creative industries by drawing on the field of translation studies, in particular the emerging literature on translation and globalization. This scholarship explores the ways in which radical changes to the world economy have affected contemporary translation but also suggests ways in which globalization of business relies on and is therefore affected by translation. While most of the studies in this field focus on commercial and technical translation, Michael Cronin's seminal text *Translation and Globalization* suggests that the translation of literary texts not only is affected by but also has an impact on changes in the "world of the book," including new technologies and tendencies toward concentration.⁶

This article examines the case of German literary publishing in the immediate aftermath of World War II to contribute new insights into the international dimensions to business strategy and growth in the creative industries. The publishers involved in the story presented here were German owned, and they operated almost exclusively within the German area as it evolved during the occupation period from four zones of occupation in 1945 to two German successor states in autumn 1949. What is more, the objects at stake—books—were produced and sold entirely in this area. Yet the content and meaning of the objects were frequently highly internationalized, in large part at the initiative of German publishers, who aligned themselves closely with the occupation authorities in the zone in which they operated. Just as importantly, however, they did so on the basis of prewar contacts and experience and existing rights and translations.

German Literary Publishing and Translation through 1945

In the late nineteenth century, newly unified Germany participated avidly in the first globalization that found its full flourishing in the early twentieth century. For German writers and publishers, this enthusiasm found concrete expression when the country signed the 1886 Berne Convention, which governed international protection of "every production in the literary, scientific and artistic domain, whatever the mode or form of its expression." Germany ratified the Convention within a year of signing it, and the still new nation was also a keen signatory of several codicils that refined it over the course of the following decades through the

5. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) provides a concise summary of this conception of technology transfer in WIPO, "Intellectual Property and Technology Transfer." See also, for instance, Battistella et al., "Inter-Organisational Technology/Knowledge Transfer: A Framework from Critical Literature Review." For the distinction between knowledge transfer and technology transfer, see Gopalakrishnan and Santoro, "Distinguishing between Knowledge Transfer and Technology Transfer Activities." For a rare engagement with knowledge transfer in relation to literary fiction, see Azagra-Caro et al., "'Getting Out of the Closet.'" More generally, in actor-network theory, as developed in *Science & Technology Studies*, artifacts are the embodiment of ideas and assumptions of their designers and makers. See, for instance, Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications" and the works cited there.

6. Cronin, *Translation and Globalization*, quotation at 220.

late 1920s. The Berne Convention and its refinements specified rights, for instance regarding translation, performance, and, eventually, broadcast of literary works and their adaptations. The rules created an international market in those rights. And German publishers were among the earliest and most active actors in the emerging trade in licenses, internationalizing content while designing and printing the books that incorporated this content in Germany.⁷

The deep involvement of German literary publishers in the international rights trade stemmed in particular from their shared faith in the existence of *Weltliteratur* (world literature), that is, writing that transcended the national language (or language group) in terms of cultural significance. This belief, of course, was not restricted to German publishers or the German public. It was widely shared across the developed world. And, as foreign language competence became less widespread among the growing ranks of educated readers, translation and the trade in related rights became ever more important. Among publishers and the public who bought these books, *Weltliteratur* became particularly prominent as a vital part of the flourishing culture of Weimar Germany, with the longstanding focus of German elites on classic texts translated into German complemented by broad-based attempts within socialist movements to establish an internationalist world literature.⁸

Although the industry landscape for the book trade in Weimar Germany varied considerably, including a wide range of sizes of firms and specializations, many publishers were active internationally. This was especially true for novels, a key sector of the industry, where translation into and out of German was particularly prominent.⁹ This international orientation of a considerable part of the German publishing industry during this period is reflected in the contemporary foreign trade statistics. No figures are available for literary books in particular, and, indeed, those that exist include other products of publishing such as magazines and music scores. Still, it is noteworthy that during the latter half of the 1920s after the disruption of war and inflation, imports of books into Germany were brisk, amounting to up to RM 22 million per year. Exports, moreover, were even more impressive, amounting to up to RM 61 million a year. This resulted in a trade surplus of up to around RM 40 million a year. Astonishingly, earnings from the exports of published goods during the late 1920s stood on a par with those from exports of motor vehicles.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, the National Socialists, who came to power in January 1933, were committed to moving in the opposite direction, away from the world market, although there had already been some movement in this direction owing to the Great Depression. Foreign trade in books did not disappear in Nazi Germany—far from it, at least during the “peacetime” National Socialist period. But import and export levels dropped by about half, as did Germany’s foreign trade surplus, although as late as 1939 publishing still earned only very slightly less from exports than motor vehicles.¹¹

7. “Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works,” accessed January 21, 2024, and related links at <https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/berne/>. Quotation, accessed January 21, 2024, https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/berne/summary_berne.html.

8. Schaub, *Proletarische Welten*.

9. This was the case for late Weimar Germany as well as both West and East Germany in the early 1950s. Taubert, *Buchproduktion und Verlagswesen der sowjetisch besetzten Zone Deutschlands im Jahre 1953*, 13, 17–21.

10. “Der Aussenhandel mit Gegenständen des Buchhandels,” 9.

11. “Der Aussenhandel mit Gegenständen des Buchhandels,” 9.

In any event, there were similar downward trends during the Nazi period for the German book trade in terms of foreign content. As Christian Adam details in his extensive study of German book publishing and reading habits during the Third Reich, the regime sought—albeit often arbitrarily, unevenly, and unsuccessfully—to focus the industry on German rather than foreign literature (including that produced in German by exiles living abroad), an effort that increased markedly in the course of the war.¹² The Nazi government adhered formally to the Berne Convention, the last prewar refinement of which came into force in Germany in October 1933, not long after the party's seizure of power in January of that year. And, somewhat surprisingly, it allowed Albatross Press, a small specialist publisher of English-language books, to continue operations in Germany and elsewhere in German-occupied Europe.¹³ But Hitler's regime largely abandoned the Convention in spirit and deed, focusing instead on promoting German-language and so-called Aryan authors, thereby devaluing and marginalizing both German and non-German members of the *Weltliteratur* firmament. Literary publishers were disproportionately affected by this policy, with a number of them, including Gustav Kiepenheuer, S. Fischer, and Ullstein, forced in summer 1933 to remove a number of books from their catalogs. Rowohlt Verlag, for instance, had 46 of its titles placed on the regime's *Liste der unerwünschten Literatur* (List of Undesirable Literature).¹⁴

As an important component of that policy, translation, which had formed a vibrant part of the German literary scene into the 1930s, was systematically targeted for repression or exclusion. For example, Nazi literary critics railed against the reading of German-language versions of foreign language detective novels, despite—or perhaps because—of the wide range of novels still available for purchase in Germany during the 1930s by authors such as Edgar Wallace, Georges Simenon, and Agatha Christie. By 1940, moreover, all 32 detective novels by Wallace, along with the complete series of works by Christie, had been placed on the list of banned books because they allegedly promoted Anglo-Saxon values and thus endangered German youth.¹⁵

Prominent publishers such as Kiepenheuer and Rowohlt, which specialized in modernist literature—often in translation—were particularly affected. They experienced “enormous economic problems connected directly to the elimination of their previous bestsellers.” The combination of these economic problems and the “Aryanization” of “Jewish” publishers, including for instance Ullstein, led to unprecedented levels of concentration in the German publishing industry. The ailing casualties of Nazi efforts at ideological purification and the victims of Nazi racial policy formed easy targets for the managers of Franz Eher (Nachfolger) Verlag, the Party's central publisher, which acquired Rowohlt, Ullstein, and around 145 others (most of which continued to publish under their own imprints as wholly owned

12. Adam, *Lesen unter Hitler*. Translated by Anne Stokes as *Bestsellers of the Third Reich*, especially chapter 13.

13. “Germany,” accessed January 21, 2024. <https://wipo.lex.wipo.int/en/treaties/parties/remarks/DE/15>; Troy, *Strange Bird*.

14. Barbian, *Literaturpolitik im “Dritten Reich,”* 65.

15. Adam, *Lesen unter Hitler*, 189–191. Translated by Anne Stokes as *Bestsellers of the Third Reich*, 156–157.

subsidiaries). Already in 1939, it was reckoned to be the largest business enterprise in the German Reich, with yearly turnover estimated at higher than that of the gigantic German chemical firm IG Farben.¹⁶

Meanwhile, as John Hench has outlined for the Americans and British in particular, the Allies were preparing to make profound changes in Germany once the Nazi regime was defeated and the country occupied. And for them, too, literary texts in translation—including fiction and literary nonfiction—formed a central part of that planning and policy.¹⁷ Already in 1942, for instance, not long after the US American entry into World War II, the Office of War Information (OWI) in Washington produced a motivational poster with the legend, “Books are weapons in the war of ideas,” which featured a stylized cartoon of the Nazi book burnings in the 1930s against the backdrop of a giant tome. A quotation from President Franklin D. Roosevelt completed the picture: “Books cannot be killed by fire.”¹⁸ The American words and images mirrored those of the Germans, whose more sinister take on the same idea was evoked in the slogan propagated by Josef Goebbels’s Propaganda Ministry in the Third Reich: “Das Buch, ein Schwert des Geistes” (“The book, a sword of the spirit”).¹⁹

Put another way, for both the Allies and the Axis powers during World War II, words expressed ideas and thus constituted potent propagandistic munitions. Books, for their part, served as a highly significant delivery system for those weapons in the arsenals of the combatant countries. What is more, for these and other contemporary actors, this was no mere metaphor; it was, in fact, why crates of books were included in the essential cargo of munitions and materiel carried onto the beaches of Normandy in the initial waves of the Allied D-Day landings in June 1944.²⁰

To reach the Anglo-American invaders’ intended target audience in Nazi-occupied Europe and in the Third Reich itself, though, books needed to convey ideas directly to their quarry, which meant that translation was essential. Accordingly, from 1943 onward, British and American government and agency personnel, trade associations, and publishers jointly implemented plans to supply books for distribution in liberated territories. The UK effort, coordinated by the British Council, featured some propaganda materials written specifically for this project alongside translations of British classics. On the American side, for its part a strong public-private partnership between the US government’s OWI and the Council of Books in Wartime (established by US publishers) developed the Overseas Editions (OE) series. Starting in early 1944, OE titles were translated from American English into Dutch, French, German, and Italian and included a range of literary fiction, light fiction, and informational texts to counteract Nazi propaganda from American English into Dutch, French, German, and Italian. Examples included Ernest Hemingway’s antifascist Spanish Civil War novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), first published in German in

16. Barbian, *Literaturpolitik im “Dritten Reich,”* 221–222, 302–306, quotation at 221–222. For IG Farben, see Peter Hayes, *Industry and Ideology*.

17. Hench, *Books as Weapons*.

18. See a high-quality image of the poster, along with further information, including date and designer, accessed January 21, 2024. <https://www.loc.gov/item/96502725/>.

19. Adam, *Der Traum vom Jahre Null*, 19.

20. Hench, *Books as Weapons*, 1.

1941 by Bermann-Fischer Verlag (based at the time in Stockholm and later with an affiliate in New York), and translated by Paul Baudisch, a German-Swedish writer, playwright, and German-English translator; Howard Fast's *Citizen Tom Paine*, a fictionalized account of Paine's role in keeping the passion for freedom alive during the American Revolution, which was an OE; and Stephen Vincent Benet's *America* (1944), also an OE, which was a commissioned by the OWI in 1942 as a short narrative history to impart American habits, history, and values to people of other lands.²¹ As the occupation of Germany approached and then began in the spring of 1945, distribution of American as well as British literary translation was deemed sufficiently important to be coordinated directly by General Dwight D. Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF).²²

The ultimate goal of this book initiative was to assist in the reorientation and rehabilitation of German publishing. Chester Kerr of the OWI estimated that the pump would have to be primed with Allied publications for an estimated three to twelve months. But the flow of Allied material was meant to cease as soon as German publishers were back online and able to satisfy demand on their own. This was, in short, a project designed to fill critical need in what would become an informational and ideological vacuum following the ouster of the Nazis. But the Americans were also keen to work fast to prevent indigenous publishers and printers filling the void entirely on their own, because US publishers wanted to make inroads into new markets and beat their British counterparts, who also eyed those markets keenly.²³

The policy of all Allied forces (including the Soviets and eventually the French, alongside the Americans and British) as they entered defeated Germany thus had significant aesthetic, cultural, and social as well as commercial dimensions. These, in turn, were intertwined with military and political objectives of demilitarization, denazification, re-education, and democratization in the deployment of books as weapons—or, more accurately perhaps, as tools—in the occupation of defeated Germany.

Aesthetic, cultural, and social considerations entered into the equation because these formed part of the very fabric of the book industry. This presupposed that choices regarding target audiences would be closely interconnected with sociocultural considerations and assumptions. Accordingly, the British and Americans not only sought to reach the broad public in both liberated areas and defeated Germany to counteract Nazi propaganda by conveying British and American democratic values and know-how. They also wished to achieve long-range goals by influencing opinion makers. As one senior OWI official put it:

Books do not have their impact upon the mass mind but upon the minds of those who mold the mass mind—upon leaders of thought and formulators of public opinion. The impact of a book may last 6 months or several decades. Books are the most enduring propaganda of all.

21. Benet, *America*, German language ed. Image of cover, accessed January 21, 2024. <https://www.amazon.com/AMERICA-Stephen-Vincent-Benet/dp/B000OLKA8C>.

22. Hench, *Books as Weapons*, passim. Hench notes that some of the OEs were not completed for publication before Allied troops began making inroads into German-occupied Europe after D-Day in June 1944. Consequently, from November of that year, a second series of slimmer (and therefore more rapidly translated and more easily transported) books began to appear as Transatlantic Editions.

23. Hench, *Books as Weapons*, 48, 72, 82–83, 86.

The result was a selection of titles that included some propaganda and middlebrow nonfiction and fiction, alongside some mainstream highbrow literature aimed at current and future opinion makers.²⁴

The deployment of books as tools in World War II and the initial Allied occupation, however, naturally also involved significant commercial dimensions. After all, although there is little doubt that publishers, regardless of location, wished to do their patriotic duty by contributing in any way they could to the war effort, they were also businesspeople, who needed to make money and devise and deploy strategies for sustaining and developing their firms. By late 1944, at the latest, though, German publishers were keenly aware that their country was about to lose the war, and those who led the Franz Eher Verlag were in no doubt that their enormous and highly profitable firm would soon cease to exist. In other words, the commercial options for German publishers in the short term at least would be fairly limited, although the experience of many of them in producing mass-market propaganda books for the Third Reich was something they might draw upon in due course.²⁵

British and American publishers, on the other hand, had clearer and more immediate grounds for optimism. But this did not necessarily mean that they faced the future without some trepidation. British publishers were concerned about the postwar development of the book trade, since, as was widely acknowledged, only a limited number of works of literary merit had been published in Britain during the conflict. American publishers, meanwhile, were keen to internationalize in the postwar period, with one possible avenue of internationalization breaking the British monopoly over the book markets in their Commonwealth.²⁶ The commercial strategies of both sets of English-language publishers were therefore certain to come into conflict with one another. And in non-English speaking markets, in particular, translation rights would constitute a major potential battleground.

During the initial occupation period, however, these conflicts did not come to the foreground. There was, in fact, consensus among the victorious Allies: although the specific ideas they wished to implement differed, the British and Americans, but also the Soviets, and, after the Yalta Conference in April 1945, the French, all agreed that the treatment of German literary publishing would form a central component of the policies and processes of denazification and re-education in occupied Germany. Literary translation therefore represented a shared nodal point of sufficient interpretive flexibility around which a network of diverse actors could negotiate their differing interests.²⁷

24. Hench, *Books as Weapons*, especially chapters 4 and 6, quotation at 70.

25. The importance of this experience should not be underestimated. As Alistair McCleery has pointed out, “The key to the ‘paperback revolution’ lay ... in the cost reductions obtained through the economies of scale of a long print run across which fixed costs could be spread.” See McCleery, “The Return of the Publisher to Book History,” 166.

26. Hench, *Books as Weapons*, especially chapter 4.

27. Jarausch, *After Hitler*, Part I; Peiss, *Information Hunters*. For an overview of Allied policy and practice in this area, especially from the US side, see Peiss, “The Denazified Library.” On interpretive flexibility of physical and virtual objects, see for instance Star, “This is Not a Boundary Object: Reflections on the Origin of a Concept.”

The Allied Occupation of Germany and the Rebirth of German Literary Publishing

Implementation of the Allies' shared policy objectives began on November 24, 1944, through a Military Government Law enacted by the joint Allied military headquarters (SHAEF) prohibiting the "printing and publication of all newspapers, magazines, periodicals, books, posters and other printed publications," along with radio, film, and other media. This Law, however, was amended already on May 12, 1945, four days after Germany surrendered, to enable publishers and other media producers and outlets to resume operations, but only after they were granted a license by the Allied occupation authorities in the zone where they were based.²⁸ The future of the industry was also shaped by Allied Control Council Law Number 2 of October 10, 1945, which seized the assets of Nazi organizations. Among other things this led to the dissolution of the giant Franz Eher Verlag and its nearly 150 subsidiaries.²⁹

Not surprisingly, given the chaos of the early occupation of the defeated country, the process for applying for and receiving a license to begin publishing operations had not been fully thought through, and sorting out this bottleneck was not something initially high on the occupiers' agenda. Indeed, in August 1945, US information control officers reported a "vast number of Germans requesting licenses to publish (80, in Munich alone)," although only a handful were issued for nonbook publishers in July and August, and only ten publishing licenses in total had been issued by the end of September. The first postwar license for a German book publisher was granted in the Soviet sector of Berlin on August 16, 1945, to Aufbau Verlag.³⁰

The Aufbau Verlag publishing license was soon followed by many others in all four zones of occupation as the occupation authorities implemented the first of the two essential aspects of the process of denazifying books: ensuring that publishers awarded licenses for the book trade were politically and ideologically reliable. The other key aspect of the process was to extirpate Nazi content immediately and forever. In other words, the Allies were also ideological, but the ideology promoted differed between the Allies and the Nazis as well as within the Allies' camp. As one former member of the US Information Control Division not long after the end of the occupation put it:

[The Division's work] was just as purposive as had been that of Dr. Goebbels' Propaganda-Ministerium, and that in neither case was the primary purpose felt to be the cultivation and perfection of German letters and art. This is not to say that the Information Control Division was adverse [sic] to literary excellence in what they permitted to appear, but rather that this was always a secondary consideration.³¹

28. SHAEF Military Government Law No. 191 (November 24, 1944; amended May 12, 1945), in US Department of State, *Germany, 1947-1949*, 594–595, quotation at 594. For a brief overview of publishing in the Allied occupation period, see Frohn, *Literaturaustausch im geteilten Deutschland*, especially 27–34.

29. The German text of the law (Kontrollratsgesetz 2, "Auflösung und Liquidierung der Naziorganisationen") (October 10, 1945), accessed January 21, 2024. <https://www.verfassungen.de/de45-49/kr-gesetz2.htm>.

30. Wurm, *Gestern. Heute. Aufbau.*, 11.

31. OMGUS, *Monthly Report of the Military Governor: Information Control* (August 1945), 4; OMGUS, *Monthly Report of the Military Governor: Information Control* (September 1945), 4; Breitenkamp, *The U.S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949*, 1.

In any event, there was evidence from social-scientific studies done in the United States that books would be particularly apt vehicles for achieving both of these objectives for the Allies, in particular for reaching and rehabilitating former Nazis:

Former Nazis were definitely more voracious book-readers than non-Nazis, and this finding underlines the desirability of reaching these people with literature useful for reorientation purposes.³²

Certainly, this sentiment may or may not have had any basis in reality; what mattered was that the Americans, along with the other occupiers, believed it.

As the Allies began to exert a major impact on the form and content of publishing from the earliest days of the occupation of defeated Germany, some key practical issues shaped the state of the industry and its immediate future. As Henry Pilgert noted in a 1953 study of media across all zones of Germany immediately after the war:

The entire period from May 1945 to July 1948 was characterized by strict Allied control of all personnel and projects in the publishing field. Printing paper at that time was extremely scarce and control of available stocks of paper was carefully regulated by Military Government. Paper was issued quarterly to publishers for specific projects. In this way the edition size was controlled...³³

The immediate impact of the combination of wartime disruption, Allied controls, and paper shortages led to a sharp reduction in output for the industry. In 1938, about 25,500 new book titles appeared in Germany; in 1945–1946, that output had fallen in occupied Germany to around 2,400, less than a tenth of the prewar total. However, output recovered quickly thereafter, and by mid-1948, after the currency reforms in the western zones followed closely by the Soviet zone, had reached about 20,000 titles. The reform also required publishers to elevate their standards for quality, in the western occupation zones, in particular, necessitating the liquidation of inventories of previously published books produced on low-quality paper that were known “in trade circles as ‘Reichsmark’ books.”³⁴

Allied occupation policy also had an impact on the shape of the postwar German publishing industry in the longer term. For one thing, although paper rationing did have an impact on edition size, not all publishers were equally affected. As we shall see in more detail shortly, the Soviets were particularly quick off the mark to favor one publisher in their zone, Aufbau Verlag, although the other Allies singled out their own favorites, too, albeit later and to a far lesser degree. The effect of such favoritism was to allow a small number of publishers significant market share that worked to their commercial advantage. A second practical impact resulted from a key American intervention in the industry at the very beginning of the occupation. Having overshot the agreed borders of their zone in the last weeks of combat

32. OMGUS Opinion Survey, Series 1, No 13, *A Preliminary Study of Book Reading in Germany*, June 28, 1946, quoted in Adam, *Der Traum vom Jahre Null*, 366, [note 6](#).

33. Pilgert, *Press, Radio, and Film in West Germany*, 18.

34. Altenhein, “Zur Ökonomie von Buchverlagen zwischen 1945 und 1965,” 66; OMGUS, *Monthly Report of the Military Governor* (August 1–September 20, 1949), 43.

before Germany surrendered unconditionally in early May 1945, US forces withdrew from the Soviet zone in June, taking with them many key personnel of the previously dominant Leipzig publishing cluster and relocating them in Wiesbaden in the US zone. Some of the Leipzig publishers stayed there, while others eventually set up shop in Frankfurt, Munich, Hamburg, and other cities, creating a geographically dispersed publishing industry in what became West Germany. Soviet policy, in contrast, generally promoted concentration of the East German book trade mainly in the Soviet sector of (later East) Berlin.³⁵

These points provide clues about the key ideological factors lurking behind the apparent Allied consensus regarding the achievement of fundamental occupation aims through books: there were some profound underlying definitional differences among the occupation authorities. Turning Germans into good democrats, in part by means of literary translation, for example, was universally agreed. However, the devil lay in defining exactly what constituted “democracy.” The Americans stood at one end of the ideological spectrum in this regard, as firm proponents of political liberty above all else, even at the expense of economic equality. The Soviets, at the other end, were committed primarily to economic equality, even at the cost of liberty. And the British and French ranged somewhere in between.

Occupation policy regarding publishing and the book trade mirrored in microcosm this central definitional ambiguity, which resulted in divergence in practice that became fully institutionalized through the currency reforms of mid-1948. These reforms then had the practical effect of dividing Germany in two economically, which resulted in autumn 1949 in the creation of the two German successor states.³⁶

To explore the interplay between evolving Allied policy and practice in the context of the Cold War, on the one hand, and the increasingly important interests of German publishers, on the other, we now consider literary translation (with an emphasis on highbrow literature aimed at current and future opinion makers) through two case studies of German publishing houses in the early occupation period: Aufbau in the Soviet zone and Rowohlt, initially licensed in the US and British zones. These case studies serve in part as a vehicle for highlighting what many accounts of the occupation neglect: the fact that the Allies were not the only ones wanting to denazify, re-educate, and reform the population of the defeated country. There were also many Germans bound and determined to do the same, not least those in the book trade, and regardless of their political persuasion. As the German exile publisher Gottfried Bermann Fischer put it as he observed the initial postwar situation in Germany from the US: “Re-educating the German people is ‘essentially a publishing problem’.”³⁷ And German publishers became more able to realize this educational aim—often in tandem with economic success—as the occupation period progressed and the focus of the Allies shifted to the emerging Cold War.

35. Altenhein, “Zur Ökonomie von Buchverlagen zwischen 1945 und 1965,” 74; Breitenkamp, *The U.S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949*, 45, 55; Reichmann, “The Reorganization of the Book Trade in Germany,” 192; Stemmler, *Das Deutsch Buchgewerbe in Konjunktur und Krise*, 47.

36. For an overview, especially from the US side, see Peiss, “The Denazified Library.” On the importance of 1948 for the book trade, see Breitenkamp, *The U.S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949*, 34.

37. Quoted by Hench, *Books as Weapons*, 175.

Aufbau: From First Mover to *Staatsverlag*

The first German-owned publishing company permitted to operate after the Allies occupied the defeated country in mid-1945 was Aufbau Verlag, registered in the Soviet zone of Berlin on August 16, 1945. Like virtually all publishers eventually licensed in the zones of military occupation through autumn 1949,³⁸ Aufbau's founding foursome included men with extensive experience in the book trade. Two of the four, however, were selected by the Soviet occupiers primarily on the basis of their reliability. The Soviets, keenly aware of the propagandistic power of literature, wished to use books to reshape their zone in their own image and trusted that German exiles who had recently returned to Germany from the Soviet Union would help them do so.

Kurt Wilhelm and Otto Schiele were the Aufbau founders with the most experience in the book industry, having worked for publishers prior to 1933. They continued that work in Germany during the Third Reich. Crucially, however, they had not joined the Nazi Party. Consequently, at Aufbau's founding in summer 1945, the Soviets considered them "unencumbered" (*"unbelastet"*) by Germany's recent past. The two subsequently became joint managing directors of Aufbau, with Wilhelm in overall charge of operations. And, steeped in the tradition of *Weltliteratur*, he planned to kick off Aufbau's program by publishing a number of works in the German liberal-humanistic tradition.³⁹

The two other partners in the new publishing venture, the economist Klaus Gysi and Heinz Willmann, a journalist, were both longstanding members of the German Communist Party (KPD). Gysi had spent much, and Willmann all, of the Nazi period in exile. Gysi had some experience in publishing, having worked as a freelancer for the renowned business and economic house Hoppenstedt Verlag before leaving Germany in 1935. He became the first editor in chief of Aufbau Verlag's cultural monthly magazine, also called *Aufbau*, when it was launched in September 1945.

Willmann was the only partner with no publishing experience whatsoever. But, as the General Secretary of the *Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands* (Cultural Association for the Democratic Renewal of Germany), which had been established already before 1945 in the Soviet Union to promote communist culture and values in post-Nazi Germany, he performed a vital political function. He was also a close associate of the *Kulturbund's* President, the renowned writer Johannes R. Becher. The two had spent much of the Nazi period together in Moscow. Becher, moreover, was a firm favorite of Soviet cultural officers during the occupation, and the occupiers backed the *Kulturbund* heavily.

The presence of Willmann, a reliable KPD bureaucrat representing the Soviet-backed premier cultural association in their zone, signaled the immediate and sustained commitment of the Soviet occupiers to influence the activities of the new publishing house directly. Indeed, the centrality of the *Kulturbund's* chosen writers, output, and messaging to Aufbau's publishing program appeared explicitly in the articles of association for the limited company formed in August 1945, even though during its initial existence Aufbau remained in private hands due to German laws still in force at the time. Being under Soviet protection, though, had a distinct

38. Adam, *Der Traum vom Jahre Null*, 56–61, especially 56–59.

39. This and the following two paragraphs are based on Wurm, *Gestern. Heute. Aufbau.*, 11–13.

upside for the new publisher during the early occupation. The Soviets, for example, heavily favored Aufbau over other publishers in allocations of paper and printing plant capacity, both of which were in very short supply. Consequently, shortly after the start of the occupation, Aufbau was the only publisher in a position to produce book editions numbering in their (often tens of) thousands rather than hundreds.⁴⁰

Measured purely in sheer sales volume, the literary publishing program of Aufbau was therefore a stunning success from the outset. German classics formed one strand of that program in its initial years, as it did for many German publishers in the occupation period: after all, they were not only guaranteed to sell but also they were out of copyright and thus free from royalties. However, a second major strand from the start of the postwar period was literature produced abroad by German exiles; publishing it in Germany after the war was itself a form of internationalization. Not surprisingly, the very first book granted for print permission by Soviet censors for print was Theodor Plievier's novel *Stalingrad*. Written in exile by the German communist author who served militarily on the Soviet side during the war, the book was a fictional account of the destruction of the German Sixth Army in this decisive battle of World War II. It became Aufbau's first bestseller, eventually selling half a million copies (before Rowohlt later took over the novel's printing rights and sold hundreds of thousands more).⁴¹ Overall, though, those running Aufbau's program went to great lengths to cultivate exile authors, many of whom had returned from Moscow (or, as in the case of Bertolt Brecht, Los Angeles) and some of whom, such as Lion Feuchtwanger, were still living abroad.⁴² Their efforts resulted in other bestsellers, including the first German-based edition of Anna Seghers' *Das siebte Kreuz* (*The Seventh Cross*). Seghers' book was first published in Mexico in 1942, with an abridged version appearing in English translation from Little, Brown and Co. later that same year.

The third key strand of the emerging Aufbau program—and the most important one for our purposes—involved translations, especially those drawn from existing backlists, usually from the pre-1933 period. Although Russian authors, such as Nikolai Gogol, Leo Tolstoy, and many others, were present and foregrounded from the start, the press initially sought to include representative literature from all four occupying powers. Translations of classics by Anatole France, Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and Robert Louis Stevenson therefore appeared alongside their Russian counterparts in Aufbau's *Illustrierte Jugendreihe* series, edited by Elisabeth Kessel.⁴³

Ever increasingly, however, translations from Russian stood at the center of the program. Johannes Becher himself was responsible for choosing many of the initial publications, and he

40. Wurm, *Gestern. Heute. Aufbau.*, 13–19, 35–37; Adam, *Der Traum vom Jahre Null*, 65–68.

41. Wurm, *Gestern. Heute. Aufbau.*, 15; Adam, *Der Traum vom Jahre Null*, 65–66. Material compiled for celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Aufbau Verlag in 1965, mentions Plievier's book as part of the initial 1945 output of the publisher but does not include it in a list of "Die erfolgreichsten Bücher des Aufbau-Verlages." Available in Bundesarchiv Berlin, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR (hereafter BAB SAPMO), DY27/789, Bl. 12, 16–17. This is perhaps the result of Plievier's move to the British zone, after which he broke off his association with Aufbau. See Wurm, *Gestern. Heute. Aufbau.*, 22.

42. Wurm, *Gestern. Heute. Aufbau.*, 19–26. For Aufbau's cultivation of exile authors, see correspondence from 1945 to 1947, including a letter from Lion Feuchtwanger in Pacific Palisades, California, to Johannes Becher, BAB SAPMO, DY27/3495.

43. Wurm, "Prospekt und Umbruch," 163–164.

was strongly backed in this by Willmann. By 1946, however, Becher enlisted the help of Erich Wendt, a German teacher and translator who had spent the previous fifteen years in exile in the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Employed in Germany prior to his time abroad as a typesetter, Wendt brought with him not only publishing experience but also a deep knowledge of Russian and Soviet literature. Together with editor and translator Hertha von Schulz, he assumed control of the Slavic list for Aufbau and took on responsibility for commissioning and checking new translations. Consequently, by the 1950s, about 70 percent of translated titles published by Aufbau and other East German publishers were from the Russian language and a further 17 percent from other languages of the Soviet bloc. This compared with only 5.5 percent from British or American originals. What is more, translations accounted for fully 20 percent of the total output of books by the early 1950s. In contrast, in the West, translated works accounted for about 8 percent of all books published, with only about 2 percent from Russian, whereas 55 percent were translations of British or American English-language originals.⁴⁴

In the context of the emerging Cold War, Wendt's appointment formed part of a drive by both the Soviet occupation authorities and the Germans running the *Kulturbund* to further tighten ideological control and purity. Some came to consider this a distinct downside to Aufbau's status as the Soviet occupiers' favorite German publishing house. The originally broad and pluralistic remit of the still new publishing house, supported at the outset by Johannes R. Becher, and its initial openness to translations from the languages of all the occupiers fell victim to the change in direction. As Aufbau's managing director in charge of operations and the main proponent of this program, Kurt Wilhelm was bound to be a human casualty.

Becher withdrew his initial support for Wilhelm and his liberal-humanistic program in late 1946, when Alexander Abusch, the head of the *Kulturbund*'s Ideological-Culture Section, went on the attack. He was backed by Heinz Willmann, an Aufbau director and the managing director of the *Kulturbund*. Ideological control was the primary objective, which would be achieved by means of wresting ownership from the four partners in the limited liability company, something only fully and finally achieved in April 1955.⁴⁵

Wilhelm tried to fight back against the attack by Abusch and Willmann, which culminated in early April 1947 in a "meeting lasting several hours." Wilhelm was subjected to a barrage of "insults and slanderous comments," including an accusation that he was a morphine addict.⁴⁶ He resigned, but the next days and weeks brought no relief. He reported having been spied upon and harassed—in what he later termed "a Gestapo-style 'shadowing' of my person and

44. On Wendt as translator, see Wurm, *Gestern. Heute. Aufbau.*, 31. On percentages, see Taubert, *Buchproduktion und Verlagswesen der sowjetisch besetzten Zone Deutschlands im Jahre 1953*, 17–20; Wurm, *Gestern. Heute. Aufbau.*, 63–64. The proportion of translations in all West German book publications grew steadily during the 1950s to around 10 percent and in 2022 stood at about 15 percent. See figures in table: "Übersetzungen ins Deutsche, 1951–2022," accessed January 21, 2024. <https://www.boersenverein.de/markt-daten/marktforschung/wirtschaftszahlen/buchproduktion/>.

45. Wurm, *Gestern. Heute. Aufbau.*, 28–30, 37; Kulturbund, "Aktenvermerk zum Brief vom 30.12.1946 des Herrn Wilhelm," January 15, 1947, BAB SAPMO, DY27/799, Bl. 15.

46. Wilhelm to Becher, April 4, 1947, with attachment, BAB SAPMO, DY27/799, Bl. 33 and 33–36. The first quotation is from the letter, Bl. 33, and the others are from Bl. 34 of the attachment.

apartment.”⁴⁷ Finally, feeling in grave danger, he and his wife fled Berlin permanently to Stuttgart in western Germany to start a new life.⁴⁸

Wilhelm’s replacement as the head of Aufbau was none other than Erich Wendt, a tried-and-true communist who had returned from exile in the Soviet Union, and a keen proponent of Slavic literature in translation. It was an early and unambiguous indication of the direction of travel for publishing in the Soviet zone of occupation and, eventually, the German Democratic Republic. Aufbau had started out as very much left leaning but also pluralistic, embracing the traditional German publishing notion of *Weltliteratur* under Wilhelm’s leadership. On that basis, it had rapidly become defeated Germany’s largest publisher, with considerable help from the Soviets. By mid-1947, however, it was well on the way to becoming the Soviet zone of Germany’s “state publishing house” (*Staatsverlag*). And translation, in particular of literature in Slavic languages, had become a key component of its publishing program and mission.

Clearly, politics and ideology were at work here but so, too, were two other key drivers: the desire by publishers, and especially Aufbau, to reach as broad an audience as possible and the very high value placed on bringing some of the best of world literature (*Weltliteratur*) to the German people, even if that was restricted in the medium term to output from countries and languages in the Soviet sphere of influence. Those two drivers also found concrete expression in the look and feel of the books published by Aufbau in the initial occupation period. They were priced to sell in large numbers, and, to achieve this, the press relied not just on preferential treatment by the Soviet authorities but also on cost savings through use of cheap, rough paper and limited investment in decoration and design.⁴⁹ The content was clearly much more important than the form.

There was certainly no question that Aufbau favored promoting Soviet-backed ideology through its program. However, there was also a significant commercial and cultural dimension to its program that harked back to pre-Nazi German publishing and linked it to what was going on in the other zones of occupation.

Rowohlt: From Bridge Builder to Premier West(ern) German Publisher

The other major German publisher for which books published both in quantity and in translation played a vital strategic role during the Allied occupation was Rowohlt. It became “the most successful publishing house of the early Federal Republic”⁵⁰ and trod a different path from Aufbau during the occupation period, although there were significant similarities in the development of the two presses.

Like three of the four men who initially headed up Aufbau Verlag, Ernst Rowohlt (1887–1960) was no stranger to the publishing trade. But he differed from them in having previously directed a press. Indeed, in 1908, aged just 20, he founded the first version of his self-named

47. Wilhelm to Becher, October 10, 1947, BAB SAPMO, DY/799, Bl. 8–10, quotation from Bl. 9.

48. Wilhelm to Becher, May 25, 1947; Gertrud Wilhelm to Willmann, June 15, 1947; Wilhelm to Becher, October 10, 1947, BAB SAPMO, DY/799, Bl. 8–10.

49. For illustrations of some of the early books published by the press, Wurm, *Gestern. Heute. Aufbau.*, 23–24.

50. Oels, *Rowohlts Rotationsroutine*, 10.

publishing house, starting off with just one title, written by a friend. During the Weimar period, however, Rowohlt Verlag came into its own as a major player, not just in German but also in world literature. By the end of the 1920s, Berlin-based Rowohlt featured a strong stable of world-class authors, including not only prominent Germans such as Johannes R. Becher, Hans Fallada, and Kurt Tucholsky but also (in translation) Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, and Thomas Wolfe.⁵¹

Ernst Rowohlt stayed in Germany during most of the Third Reich period, where he played an active role in both publishing and propaganda. In 1937, at the first opportunity after 1933 to do so, Rowohlt applied for and was accepted to membership of the Nazi Party. His publishing house, moreover, was affiliated from 1936 onward with Franz Eher Nachfolger, the gigantic Nazi publishing juggernaut whose titles included the Führer's own *Mein Kampf*. After a time in Brazil in the first years of the war, from 1941 to 1943, Rowohlt became part of the Sonderstab F, assisting the Wehrmacht in propaganda for the Arab world, with Rowohlt himself responsible for anti-Semitic propaganda within the organization. This was certainly not a promising record with which to enter the postwar period.

Nevertheless, after careful scrutiny of all available archival sources, historian David Oels concluded that although compromised in many ways, Rowohlt was not a Nazi; his was not a Nazi publishing house; and he was not anti-Semitic. Instead, Rowohlt plied a “contorted” (“*krumm*”) path through the minefield that was the Third Reich.⁵² Volker Berghahn and others have recently drawn attention to this “grey zone” between outright support for and clear resistance to the Nazi regime. Many prominent figures in both postwar Germanies—including, apparently, Ernst Rowohlt—managed to occupy this space.⁵³ In any event, on the back of a barrage of letters of support from demonstrably unencumbered authors and intellectuals in Germany and abroad, Rowohlt, who had moved late in the war from his home near Berlin to Hamburg (eventually in the British zone of occupation), was given the all clear in denazification proceedings in early 1946.⁵⁴

Ernst Rowohlt, however, was unwilling to allow the denazification process to interfere with a rapid postwar return to publishing. For that reason, he relied on his son, Heinrich Maria Ledig-Rowohlt, to obtain one of the first permits to publish in Stuttgart (in the US zone of occupation), already in November 1945. Heinrich Maria had himself long been associated with German publishing, and he worked closely with his father to establish the new company and develop its program.⁵⁵

51. On the pre-1933 Rowohlt list, see Gieselbusch et al., *100 Jahre Rowohlt*, 32–33. Ernst Rowohlt himself provided an overview of his career through 1949 to Breitenkamp for the former US information control officer's *The U.S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949*, 53–55. He also made some of the same claims about his activities in the Third Reich in Ernst Rowohlt, “Memorandum,” March 1946, reproduced in Gieselbusch et al., *100 Jahre Rowohlt*, 137.

52. Oels, *Rowohlts Rotationsroutine*, 7–10.

53. Berghahn, *Journalists between Hitler and Adenauer*. For an alternative perspective, see Evans, “Whiter Washing.”

54. Breitenkamp, *The U.S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949*, 54–55; Oels, *Rowohlts Rotationsroutine*, 181.

55. Breitenkamp, *The U.S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949*, 54–55; Oels, *Rowohlts Rotationsroutine*, 179.

As the younger Rowohlt later noted, he gained his publishing license under the condition that he put out a youth magazine aimed at re-education. It was an area of publishing in which neither he nor his father had any experience. However, using contacts in the industry, they learned quickly. After Ernst gained a publishing permit in the British zone in March 1946, the magazine, *Pinguin*, reached a broader audience still, becoming the flagship and chief source of income for the new version of Rowohlt Verlag. Indeed, the information control officer for the Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS), responsible for the Rowohlt operation in Stuttgart reported in 1947 that

Popular magazines [in occupied Germany] have generally appeared in an edition of fifty-thousand copies. The highest circulation figure was recently permitted in two youth magazines: *Horizont* (Horizont Verlag Berlin: 250,000 semi-monthly) and *Der Pinguin* (Editor Erich Kästner, Stuttgart Rowohlt: 200,000 semi-monthly).⁵⁶

Small wonder, then, that David Oels notes in his history of the publisher from Weimar through the 1950s that, in the early occupation period, “book publishing was ... just a sideline for the publishing house.” And, as Ernst Rowohlt wrote to his friend, the novelist Hans Fallada, in August 1946, “You can well imagine that that [i.e., *Pinguin*] turns a pretty profit.”⁵⁷

Ernst Rowohlt, therefore, was a dedicated entrepreneur, unlike most of the top brass at Aufbau; although, like them, he was simultaneously committed to the objective of re-education through translations. To achieve both aims, Rowohlt took the initiative to become the first publisher to gain printing licenses for all four zones of occupation, supplementing the initial US license in November 1945 with a British one in March 1946, a French license in Baden-Baden in September 1946, and a Soviet one for his Berlin office, which opened in 1947.⁵⁸

Because paper was in desperately short supply through 1948, Rowohlt also used contacts, in particular at Aufbau, and eventually through his own outpost in the Soviet sector of Berlin, to gain access to paper and printing capacity, which were in greater supply in the Soviet zone than in other zones by virtue of Soviet occupation policy. It is also clear that Rowohlt, regardless of the early importance of his popular youth magazine *Pinguin* for the company's bottom line, was dedicated above all to the publication of books: he diverted paper allocations earmarked for the magazine to this end.

This was not the only indication of Rowohlt's focus on books despite deriving most of his income from magazine sales. Developing an idea proposed initially by his son, he deployed rotational printing technology and cheap newsprint to publish his first RoRoRos, initially in newspaper-sized format and eventually as smaller-format paperbacks. They subsequently became a popular brand, playing on Rowohlt's name, rotational printing, and the *Romane* (novels) that made up the series. A final indication of his allegiance to books lay in the fact that he put out larger editions than any other publisher in Germany in the immediate postwar

56. Reichmann, “The Reorganization of the Book Trade in Germany,” 190.

57. Oels, *Rowohlts Rotationsroutine. Markterfolge und Modernisierung*, 167; Rowohlt to Fallada, August 27, 1946, quoted in Oels, 167.

58. Breitenkamp, *The U.S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949*, 54–55; Adam, *Der Traum vom Jahre Null*, 57.

period, with the exception of Aufbau.⁵⁹ All of these elements of his entrepreneurship, moreover, were summed up nicely in Rowohlt's pithy formulation, which appeared in one form or another in every one of the early RoRoRo publications: "Put in a purely technical way, this is the basic principle behind the RoRoRos: as many letters as possible on as little paper as possible, and sold as cheaply as possible."⁶⁰

As might be imagined from this description, the first RoRoRo mass-market editions were not exactly aesthetically pleasing objects. Like Aufbau's initial products, they featured simple line-drawn illustrations on their covers, were tightly typeset in basic fonts, and were printed on cheap newsprint paper. A typical example was Rowohlt's 1947 edition of Plievier's *Stalingrad*.⁶¹ The physical appearance of these volumes, liked those produced by Aufbau, practically screamed out one thing: *the content and not the artifact is important*.

That message also conformed to Rowohlt's broader vision, which encompassed far more than mere sales figures and profits, and extended to re-educating as many members of the public as possible by means of *Weltliteratur*. His overall objectives therefore had more in common with other entrepreneurs in creative industries—including those leading Aufbau—than with businesspeople more generally. He articulated his didactic aims passionately in an interview published in *Die Neue Zeitung* on December 9, 1946:

Are you aware that in Germany there's an entire generation that knows nothing of what we call literature? Sinclair Lewis, Joseph Conrad, André Gide—they hardly even know their names. In 1938 already, no English or American authors could be published, and when the war broke out all foreign literature disappeared from libraries, not to mention German literature from before 1933. Thirty-year-olds today were 17 at that time. It's this, and this alone, that interests me at the moment, this spiritual [*geistig*] vacuum in the generation that's now expected to drag us out of this mess.⁶²

The enactment of this vision came through books published in the RoRoRo series. The first four novels appeared in December 1946, starting with Ernest Hemingway's *In einem anderen Land* (*In Another Country*), a translation of Hemingway's 1929 novel *A Farewell to Arms*, named after a short story from 1927 and translated for Rowohlt in 1930 by Hemingway's only authorized translator, Annemarie Horschitz-Horst. Horschitz-Horst was a Jew who fled Germany for London in 1933, as she was unable to work as a translator in Nazi Germany. The publication of Hemingway in translation was followed in quick succession by Henri-Alain Fournier's pre-World War I Bildungsroman *Der große Kamerad* (*Le Grand Meaulnes*), 1913, a reprint of the first authorized translation into German for Rowohlt in 1930 by Arthur Seiffer, a French-German and English-German translator and interpreter; Kurt Tucholsky's antiauthoritarian novel *Schloß Gripsholm* (a reprint of Rowohlt's 1931 first edition of the novel by the German-Jewish, politically engaged Weimar journalist and writer, who lived outside of

59. Breitenkamp, *The U.S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949*, 54; Oels, *Rowohlts Rotationsroutine*, 187–194.

60. Quoted in Reinhold, "RoRoRo – Bücher für Alle," 198.

61. The cover of the 1947 edition is reproduced in Gieselbusch et al., *100 Jahre Rowohlt*, 134.

62. Ernst Rowohlt, Interview in *Die Neue Zeitung* (December 9, 1946), quoted in Oels, *Rowohlts Rotationsroutine*, 207.

Germany from 1924, and was stripped of his citizenship after his books were burned in 1933); and Joseph Conrad's *Taifun* (*Typhoon*, first published as a novel in English in 1903), a reprint of a translation by Elise Eckert, which was originally published by Stuttgart Engelholm Verlag in 1908.⁶³ Each of the first three had an initial print run of 50,000 copies, when most other publishers were printing only a tenth of that. Priced to sell at RM 0.50–1.50, they sold out almost immediately.

Rowohlt's emphasis on *Weltliteratur*, as articulated in his interview from December 1946, is clear from this list. Two additional things are also worth highlighting, however. First, the initial list of RoRoRos is a striking demonstration of just how politically astute Rowohlt was in his choice of authors for the initial publications in the series: American, French, German, and British(-based) and soon to be followed by Russian.⁶⁴

Second, as noted above, all these authors had already been published in Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s, mostly by Rowohlt. However, reissuing them in postwar editions was not entirely without challenges. Reacquiring rights for translations was a particularly thorny issue in the period just after the war. Thus, although Rowohlt had purchased the rights to Hemingway, John Steinbeck, and Sinclair Lewis, among others, prior to 1933, the licenses had been terminated in mid-1945 by the Allies. Not long after gaining permission to print in the US and British zones, however, Rowohlt successfully applied for renewal of the rights to publish translations of these and other American authors through the Re-education Program of the US Military Government, although funds for contracts for translation rights for newer works were in short supply. Indeed, OMGUS Information Control reported in September 1945 that translation rights for only 20 American titles in total for *all* publishers in occupied Germany had been acquired, with negotiations ongoing for 80 more.⁶⁵

Rowohlt also made use of his prewar contacts with former exiles and with foreign authors, just as was the case with Aufbau. A letter from Hemingway to Rowohlt of 18 December 1946 provides an indication of the strength of the German publisher's reputational capital. "You had one hell of a war," Hemingway wrote, "and I am delighted that you were not one of the numerous Krauts that we killed in Schnee Eifel or Hurtgen Forest... (Glad we never killed each other.)" Hemingway indicated his willingness to have Rowohlt publish him in Germany again, reassuring the publisher that "In the meantime, I will not make any other deals with German publishers without getting in touch with you first." The internationally renowned American author commented archly in closing that this was not just about friendship: "...please try to dig up a little money so that I will not have to be at the Kaiserhof again while you chase money all over Berlin" before signing off "With warmest Affection, Your old counter-comrade."⁶⁶ Rowohlt, moreover, did not restrict his networking to those in the western zones. He also used his close relationship with Aufbau in the early occupation period to acquire the rights to Stalin-Prize laureate Victor Nekrasov's first-hand account of

63. See Förster, "Conrad: The First German Translations," 95.

64. Breitenkamp, *The U.S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949*, 54–55; Oels, *Rowohlt's Rotationsroutine*, 191. See also Reinhold, "RoRoRo – Bücher für Alle," 200–203.

65. Reinhold, "RoRoRo – Bücher für Alle," 207–208; *Monthly Report of the Military Governor: Information Control* (September 1945), 5.

66. Hemingway to Rowohlt, December 18, 1946, reproduced in Gieselbusch et al., *100 Jahre Rowohlt*, 141.

the battle of Stalingrad, *In den Schützengräben von Stalingrad* (*In the Trenches of Stalingrad*), for RoRoRo.⁶⁷

As the Cold War heated up, however, Rowohlt's balancing act in working in, for, and through all four zones of postwar Germany was bound to falter. Changes in US policy resulting from increasing tensions with Moscow as the Cold War intensified had a direct effect on left-leaning Rowohlt. American authorities blocked the publisher when he tried to acquire the rights to American authors tainted somehow with communist sympathies, such as Howard Fast, John Dos Passos, and William Faulkner. And a firestorm of criticism of his program came from the other side of the political spectrum, from the Soviet zone, when Rowohlt published *Abrechnung mit Hitler* (*Settling Accounts with Hitler*) by former Economics Minister and Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht in late 1948.

The furor ultimately spelled the end of Rowohlt's cooperation with Aufbau. As Ursula Reinhold has written, by mid-1948, his goal "not to allow the division [of Germany] into zones to create spiritual barriers between us' ... was already overtaken by events. An independent position between the political fronts was no longer possible."⁶⁸ Although Ernst Rowohlt personally maintained cordial relations with many in the East, Rowohlt the publisher came down squarely in the German liberal-humanistic tradition of *Weltliteratur* that Wilhelm had espoused at Aufbau through mid-1946, a tradition Wilhelm's successor, Wendt, pursued much less enthusiastically, at least initially.

Rowohlt's embrace of that liberal-humanistic position got a boost in June 1948, moreover, when a new and stable currency, the deutschmark, was introduced in the western zones of Germany. Although, in the short term, he and his press had to navigate a period of adjustment and near bankruptcy, a crisis arising in part from the need to liquidate low-quality "Reichsmark" editions from the precurrency reform period,⁶⁹ soon Rowohlt and other West German publishers could purchase translation rights from abroad much more freely and easily. This afforded Rowohlt lucrative opportunities into the 1950s and beyond, in particular for translations of *Weltliteratur*, which knitted together the publisher's commercial interests and the vision he had expressed so passionately in his interview of December 1946.

Conclusion

Literary translation was a nodal point in a network of international actors immediately before and during the Allied occupation of Germany between 1945 and 1949. It was a place where the interests and aspirations of those actors met and played out through the medium of a set of nonhuman actors: books, produced in Germany but with international content. The re-education and reorientation of the defeated Germans through the promotion of the ideals and objectives of the victorious Allies constituted a key set of issues at stake, with each of the

67. Reinhold, "RoRoRo – Bücher für Alle," 207–208.

68. Reinhold, "RoRoRo – Bücher für Alle," 207, 210–216, quotation at 216.

69. See especially "Marek, Kurt W. Wie 'Götter, Gräber und Gelehrte' entstand. Ein Lektor schreibt ein Bestseller und saniert damit den Verlag," 159–164, in Gieselbusch et al. *100 Jahre Rowohlt*. On "Reichsmark" editions: OMGUS, *Monthly Report of the Military Governor* (August 1–September 20, 1949), 43.

Allies promoting a different vision of democratization for the Germans in their zones. But just as important were deeply entrenched values relating to the promotion of *Weltliteratur* on the part of German literary publishers as well as the commercial interests of those publishers, the authors who supplied their content, and their counterparts in Allied countries whose work was translated. Knowledge transfer stood at the heart of this process.

At the end of the war and during the initial occupation period, the objectives of the Allies took precedence, as might be expected. Thus, through 1946, the purging of Nazi ideology and democratic re-education stood at the top of the agenda. But even in this early period, differences among the Allies had begun to emerge, especially between American and Soviet conceptualizations of democracy, which the occupiers saw embodied and epitomized in their respective national languages and literatures. And at the same time, German actors, not least those who were also keen on distancing themselves from the Nazi era, were on the ascendance. As part of this group, many German publishers recognized that the continued Allied presence in Germany and the Allies' growing estrangement from one another presented them with an opportunity to pursue their own cultural and commercial interests.

The cases of two German publishing houses during the Allied occupation period—Aufbau in the Soviet zone of occupation and Rowohlt, primarily based in the American and British zones—illustrate the interactions among the actors and the outcomes. Aufbau's directors used Slavic literature as a tool to integrate themselves into the emerging Soviet bloc, privileging Soviet-Marxist ideology, while at the same time seeking commercial success, in no small measure through pursuit of re-education of Germans in the aftermath of National Socialism through *Weltliteratur*, albeit mainly through a Russian lens. Meanwhile, Rowohlt, in keeping with the values of its eponymous managing director and the capitalist (and therefore no less ideological) orientation of emerging West Germany, was much more commercial in his approach. But Rowohlt, too, simultaneously pursued re-education of the German population through *Weltliteratur*, if mainly through a non-Russian, primarily English-language (and French) lens.

While there were significant differences that emerged between the two publishing companies, there were also crucial commonalities. Both used literary translations as a means to achieve their common aim of reviving *Weltliteratur* in the German language following the Nazi period in order to fill gaps in the cultural education of current and future opinion makers and citizens, while at the same time aligning their businesses with the literature of their respective hegemonic power. What is more, due to prevailing conditions, they delivered their literary translations through books that were similar in design, format, and size of edition, if increasingly divergent in terms of language of origin and content. And finally, the two publishers, along with others in both East and West Germany, used literary translations and related trade in rights as springboards for further internationalization in the postoccupation period.

These commonalities served as a basis for inter-German trade in rights that grew substantially in the decades that followed, despite (and sometimes because of) the vagaries of the Cold War. What is more, when combined from the 1980s with strategies of merger and acquisition, they formed a foundation that helped enable a number of German publishers to join the ranks of the largest and most influential media concerns in the world, including, for instance, the

Bertelsmann Group's wholly owned Penguin Random House (PRH) subsidiary, the largest English-language publisher.⁷⁰

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