Publishing Ursula K. Le Guin in East Germany

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Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* were two of the few American science fiction novels published in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Le Guin shares this distinction with Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Aldous Huxley, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Like all literature that appeared in East Germany, Le Guin’s titles passed through an elaborate approval process before they appeared in the science fiction publishing house: Verlag Das Neue Berlin (DNB). *The Left Hand of Darkness* came out in 1978 under the title *Winterplanet*. *The Dispossessed* was published in 1987, just two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as *Planet der Habenichtse* (literally, planet of those with nothing).

At first, it may come as a surprise that these particular authors made it past a censor that enforced the prevailing ideology of East Germany’s Socialist Unity Party (SED). Many outside of the former GDR assume publishing policy was determined from the top down. This belief certainly has its basis in truth. Within the country’s Ministry of Culture, publishing decisions were made in accordance with the official literary policy of Socialist Realism. Originally adapted in the fifties from Stalinist Russia, this politically driven construct envisioned all literature to be an educational tool with which to model the future envisioned by the SED. All East German authors were required to demonstrate their Parteilichkeit, or dedication to the party, through their portrayal of this totalizing, dogmatic “reality.”

At the same time, GDR cultural policy was constantly evolving to meet the needs of the current economic and political situation. By the seventies,
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seen in the growth and variety of East German science fiction publications at the time, officials within the Ministry of Culture did allow limited literary experimentation. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming writes, "concepts such as 'socialist realism' and 'critical' changed over time, often in response to the kinds of texts that writers were submitting for publication." Consequently, "[n]egotiation constantly occurred as the borders of censorship were regularly redefined" (57). Erik Simon, former editor for science fiction from socialist countries at DNB, concurs with this statement. "Certain things were entirely impossible, some were clearly OK, but most could be made possible if someone really wanted it, and the time was right, and that someone knew how to do it" (E-mail 2). Editor Michael Szameit confirmed this practice in an interview in 1999.

To an extent, the primary agents of science fiction policy were the genre's editors and authors who constantly navigated the boundaries of a programmatic literary policy. This phenomenon is apparent particularly in the appearance of works by Ursula K. Le Guin, an author from the "capitalist West." Today, it is possible to document the narrative strategies used by editors at DNB to gain censor approval. The following pages first outline the prevailing science fiction policy in the GDR in the sixties and seventies. This contextual information highlights the manner in which cultural officials believed West German television and the availability of illegal Western science fiction literature challenged East German interests. The GDR also had an elaborate publication approval process. An in-depth look at these archival documents, which became available after the fall of the Berlin Wall, makes it possible to access the editorial voices responsible for the Ursula Le Guin novels. My analysis focuses on the editor, not as an obedient instrument of the state, but as the active participant in the publication process, who understood and exploited the gaps and fissures of a repressive literary system.

A quote from the editor's abstract of The Dispossessed presented to the East German censorship board provides a good introduction to the country's governing political paradigm. The abstract describes the book as the following:

The juxtaposition of a capitalist societal system with that of a socialist anarchic utopia disguised as an alien civilization. The socialist anarchic utopia is an alternative model to the exploitative society and is also examined critically as its utopian development is revealed.³

This sentence employs the dichotomy that dominated Cold War politics: Capitalism versus Communism, the United States versus the Soviet Union, and West Germany versus the East Germany. Orthodox interpretations of Cold War ideology drove publishing policy in the GDR in the fifties and sixties. The pairing of socialism and anarchy employed in the above quote from the
late eighties was out of the question in the sixties. Editors could not support a novel that strayed from the Party's vision of communism or socialism. For example, Stanislaw Lem's satirical *Star Diaries*, came out only in highly abbreviated form in 1961, and had little immediate stylistic influence on GDR science fiction.

SED science fiction policy wished to curtail reader exposure to alternative ideas that might contradict its interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. The restriction of access to foreign literature remained difficult to enforce in a dictatorship on the border with its other historical half—West Germany. Relatives and friends devised ways of sneaking in the latest Phillip K. Dick or Isaac Asimov. Fans then hand-typed these copies for secret distribution among friends and fan club members.

The seventies brought with them a cluster of changes that forced open the door to greater literary innovation. One primary factor in the case of science fiction was the spread of access to West German television. Television provided an ultimately insurmountable challenge to the East German censor. Beginning in the late sixties, East German stores sold television sets so that households could watch the country's state-run channels. In reality, those not ideologically opposed to the practice, equipped their new sets with illegal antennae in order to receive West German programming. Viewers saw *Star Trek* (Gene Roddenberry, 1966-1969), Great Britain's *The Avengers* (Jonathan Alwyn and Robert Asher, 1961-1969), and the German production *Raumpatrouille, Die phantastischen Abenteuer des Raumschiffes ORION* [Space Patrol. The Fantastic Adventures of the Spaceship ORION. Michael Braun and Theo Mezger, Spaceship Orion, 1966]. As the seventies progressed, West German television quickly became the information source for the most recent developments in science fiction literature, television and film from the West. In many programs, East Germans regularly saw the portrayal of a western reality against which their own paled in comparison (Schröder 40).

In 1971, a regime change responded to calls for higher quality material goods and a greater diversity of choice designed to compete with the society East Germans saw on television. Part of his new economic plan of "socialist Rationalization," Erich Honecker spoke of a "real existing" socialism of higher wages, cheaper prices, and more quality products that were designed to reach everyone despite budgetary concerns (Staritz 276-279).

In the field of literature, cultural officials allowed for limited experimentation with satirical and fantasy forms. A new generation of talented authors turned to science fiction as a way to displace their critique of the system in another time or onto another planet. Often newly successful authors composed for a "knowing" reader and hid veiled allusions to East Germany's Socialist Unity Party and a stagnating communist system within their alien fictions. Thus, part of the enjoyment of reading science fiction in East Germany came from detecting the
metaphorical references. Many became interested in science fiction solely due to the sleuthing practice of “reading between the lines” (Johanna and Günter Braun, 33). Others began to read science fiction as a result of their interest in Stanislaw Lem or in foreign science fiction films shown on western TV. Still others were drawn to the increasing quality of new East German titles and to the heightened visibility of the Soviet space program in the seventies and eighties.

It should be emphasized that East German premier Erich Honecker’s call for greater experimentation in the literary sphere did not translate to the opening of an otherwise closed book market. After a period in which he declared that there should be “no taboos,” the Ministry of Culture cracked down once again in 1976 following the expatriation of singer/songwriter Wolf Biermann (Emmerich 246-247). Meanwhile growing popular interest in science fiction and support within the Ministry of Culture led publishing houses to increase their science fiction quota each year (Steinmüller 12). In the seventies, innovative titles from the East Bloc, such as the Strugatsky brothers and further Lem publications, became available in their complete editions. More and more East Germans began to write science fiction as well. Still, works by authors from the “capitalist” West remained few and far between. (Neumann, *Grosse Illustrierte* 559-570 and 405-428).

One reason for this gap was the pejorative use of the term “science fiction” by East German literary critics to refer expressly to Western science fiction. In an article in *Der Sonntag*, the primary cultural voice of the SED, author and critic Hubert Horstmann differentiated between bourgeois science fiction and socialist utopian literature. In his words, bourgeois science fiction “focused on science and technology” and “did not at all make clear that society would develop in a positive fashion…. It always degenerated into slavery and killed itself with its own creations” (7). On the other hand, Horstmann believed socialist utopian literature employed the Humanism of Goethe, Schiller, and Marx and provided social explanations for human advancement. Secondly, and more importantly for Horstmann, high quality literature of this type “discovers real possibilities and ways, in which the current path might be improved or avoid potential dangers” (7). This final statement is one example of many from select authors, critics, and editors in the late sixties and early seventies that argued for the legitimacy of constructive critique within East German science fiction.

The fact that Western science fiction authors appeared at all stems from a change in censorship policy on the genre. One example of the rationale behind this change is apparent in a discussion of the prohibition of the popular science fiction fan club, the Stanislaw Lem Club in 1973. The investigation of one of the club’s members after he asked “uncomfortable questions” in Physics class at the Technical University in Dresden led authorities to search the club’s library. There, they found an array of illegal Western science fiction
literature (Simon, “Blütezeit” 46 and Both, Neumann, and Scheffler 48). This event prompted an unusual emergency meeting of cultural officials from the Ministry of Culture, the Kulturbund and the German Writers’ Union on the subject of science fiction.

In spite of existing prejudice against what many cultural officials perceived to be a suspect genre, science fiction as a whole did not receive the blame for the events of the Lem Club Affair. Rather, conference participants held the Kulturbund, responsible for the club member’s actions on account of insufficient supervision and instruction of the groups under its jurisdiction. At the meeting, Adolf Sckerl believed that, because “the developments in Dresden had such a strong and negative influence on consumption,” the other clubs must become “more vigilant” (“Stenographische Niederschrift eines Gesprächs” 65). Sckerl emphasized that it was not the literature itself that posed a threat, but the subjective manner in which it was read. He placed responsibility on the individual reader (120).

Consequently, with regards to science fiction fan clubs, the meeting transcript provides evidence of a change in the censorship policy on science fiction from one of prohibition to limited availability and supervised interpretation. It was no longer effective to proscribe the availability of all Western science fiction due to the continual access to western media. According to the strategy outlined in the document, rather than prohibit it altogether, readers now were to be guided in their interpretation of approved examples from the West. In the future, ideological control existed at the level of the censor and of reader reception.

Accordingly, fan clubs caught with western reading material in their libraries were reorganized. The new clubs discussed western science fiction under the close supervision of new politically correct directors. Importantly, the director was to steer the interpretation of the western publication along the appropriate socialist lines of discussion. Club members read Western science fiction only in coordination with other ideologically appropriate authors in order to achieve a “correct” balance (Simon, “Blütezeit” 51).

What is more important is that this meeting documents some of the first high-level arguments made in favor of Western science fiction by the head science fiction editor at DNB, Ekkehard Redlin. Redlin had worked at this publisher, which specialized in entertainment literature, since the fifties. His extensive experience with numerous science fiction authors and successful publication applications granted him the ability to anticipate what would or would not pass the censor. In the meeting protocol, Redlin refers to science fiction as a “thought game,” a term, which was commonly used among fans as well. He praises the productive qualities of this cognitive form of play as a type of relaxation. It also could point out potential missteps along the path from socialism to communism. Western Trivialliteratur, on the contrary, contained only dangerous “mesmerizing and escapist” qualities. Redlin’s definition in this and other forums advocated
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for science fiction as a legitimate form of socialist literature and art. It was one, which must be taken seriously and incorporated into its “literary propaganda” (“Stenographische Niederschrift eines Gesprächs” 104a).

Yet, Redlin argued further for this new quality of socialist literature to include not just authors of the East Bloc, but also select authors from the West. Couched in the language of internationalism within socialism, Redlin stated that the term “science fiction” was merely a class marker and not a marker of quality (“Stenographische Niederschrift eines Gesprächs” 42). Where authors of this genre from the West were immediately equated negatively with “science fiction,” Redlin stressed that the societal system did not necessarily determine the socialist value of science fiction. Instead, he extolled the ability of an author such as Ray Bradbury, who, although he lived in the West, wrote “humanistic” stories.

The first publications of contemporary science fiction authors from the West began in 1974. The authors chosen were those deemed to be sufficiently socialist in tone despite the “limitations of their bourgeois society,” which shaped their writing. The majority of such authors had short stories published in anthologies of international science fiction. A few had whole novels published in the GDR. The first of these were Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 in 1974 and The Illustrated Man in 1977. In 1978, Ursula Le Guin’s The Left Hand of Darkness shared the year of publication with Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World (1978). Bradbury’s The Martian Chronicles appeared in 1981, and Isaac Asimov’s I Robot in 1982. The Dispossessed, as stated before, appeared first in 1987. The circulation of these novels was very small (only 15,000 - 20,000 copies per book) and they appeared only in one edition (Neumann 313-358). The purchase of publication rights from West German science fiction publishers remained comparatively expensive due to East Germany’s limited resources of West German Marks. Yet, these novels appeared as an answer to the number of smuggled books from the West. If it were impossible to restrict access to Western science fiction books and television, then a limited range of politically acceptable novels would be made available in East Germany. The demand was certainly there.

Concerning the publication of Ursula Le Guin’s novels, besides evidence of a publishing policy shift, it is also possible to review the documents generated by the publication process itself. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming uses Rezensur to describe the processes of censorship and editorial review, which made up the “strict licensing and permission procedure” that each writer navigated to successfully publish in the GDR (55). Each novel had to undergo an extensive publication approval procedure (Druckgenehmigungsverfahren). Every application for publication consisted of a recommendation from the editor in charge, as well as at least one external review by a literary critic, academic, or additional editor. In the case of science fiction, both the editorial recom-
mendation and the external review evaluated the manuscript according to its ideological appropriateness and its overall literary quality. Often a scientist was engaged to write a technical review. Depending upon the “appropriateness” of the manuscript, the review board, located in the Hauptverwaltung für Verlagswesen und Buchhandel, Abteilung Schöne Literatur (Office of Publishing and Book Sales, Section on Fine Literature), approved its publication, required changes, or refused permission. Requested changes were reevaluated through additional external reviews and resubmitted. Approved applications are now stored in the German National Archive in Berlin.

My discussion of both The Left Hand of Darkness and The Dispossessed is based on the application materials for these respective novels. The application for The Left Hand of Darkness consists of a cover sheet, on which it indicates that the rights for the manuscript were bought from West Germany’s Heyne Verlag. East Germany provided its own translation. Next, the application includes an abstract of the novel, which emphasizes Le Guin’s roots in fantasy literature. The abstract labels her a bourgeois-humanist, who makes visible the most important problems of human existence (225). Finally, the application includes two reviews, one from Michael Berndt, the book’s editor, and one, from Heinz Entner, the author of several articles on science fiction in prominent GDR journals. The application for The Dispossessed is very similar, although it includes a twelve-page external review from an English professor at the University of Rostock. The sheer length of this review can be attributed to the need to justify the novel’s ambivalent portrayal of communism.

When considering all four of the reviews, several common methods of argumentation peculiar to East Germany come to the fore. Much like any justification in the West, the reviewers stress Le Guin’s reputation as an award-winning science fiction author as well as the quality of her writing. What becomes more interesting is the literary analysis of her work. Each review, which had the censorship board as its target audience, interprets the novels using Marxist-Leninist categories of thought.

This process is more aptly characterized as a translation into the society’s dominant code as defined by Stuart Hall in his article “Encoding and Decoding.” Hall describes the “determinate moments” of “encoding” and “decoding” in his analysis of production and reception in a free market economy (129). The process of encoding entails transforming the various “meaning structures” present in production into a “meaningful discourse” determined by the “rules of language” in that society (130). Inevitably, Hall states, the rules or code(s) of the “dominant cultural order” become the standard discourse as it communicates most effectively with the broadest array of consumers. It is the dominant code or “preferred meaning” that “makes sense” to the reader who occupies the “dominant-hegemonic position” in society (136). In East Germany, socialist realism was not a societal code that seemed “natural” (Hall)
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to many of its citizens, but was enforced by the SED. Authors “encoded” their science fiction to a greater or lesser degree through the process of “self-censorship” and in working with their editor.

As Michael Berndt relates the story, he emphasizes the ethical nature of the arrival of Genly Ai. Ai is the first mobile of the Ekumen on the planet Winter. In the novel, Ai has come to Winter to invite its human societies of Karhide and Orgoreyn to join this interstellar communication and trade organization. Ai arrives with the goal to “exchange knowledge” rather than “to influence strange worlds through the use of force.” (227). This phrase signals ideologically that the visit is peaceful, and not “aggressive” or “imperialist,” adjectives which East German ideologues attributed to the West. The editor’s description of Karhide as “half-feudal” also signals a particular stage of societal development in Marxist-Leninist thought along a time line in which capitalism came next, followed by socialism and, finally, communism.

According to this philosophy, the political nature of the individual’s society determined her personality. Consequently, a communist society was inhabited by what Western scholars termed the socialist personality. Often in GDR science fiction, these characters are communist super scientists dedicated to the pursuit of scientific socialism and willing to sacrifice their lives for this cause. These ideal characters were rational and peaceful, shaped by and conscious only of their contribution to the SED’s interpretation of secular Humanism. According to Berndt, Genly Ai possesses isolated characteristics of this personality. On the contrary, the inhabitants of a half-feudal society, particularly of the ruling class (here Argaven of Karhide, his cousin Tibe, and the commensals of Orgoreyn) are power-hungry, easily threatened, and violent.

In the GDR of the seventies, a “thought game” within science fiction was officially justifiable if it served to further Marxist-Leninist ideals. However, to avoid potential misunderstanding or negativity on the part of the censor, the editor emphasizes the novel’s distance from any actual “socialist” truth or reality whatsoever. Importantly,

[Le Guin’s] portrayal is not designed to be an alternative to relations and conditions on Earth or to present an estranged version thereof, but rather to encourage reflection with regards to biological facts that have determined the development of humanity. (229)

The editorial review downplays political issues and focuses on the novum (Suvin) that shapes Winter’s societies. The inhabitants, though of human extraction, are androgynous until they enter the sexual period of kemmer, where they temporarily become male or female. According to Berndt, the civilization must have a “strongly rational” basis, as the “societal value of a person” is not “governed by qualities that are sexually determined. Solely the competence of
the individual, his knowledge, etc. determines his social status" (228). In this society, "morality" is based on the "respect for the dignity of the individual," where one manifestation is the honor code of "shifgrethor" (228). The second review also points to the "competence, knowledge, rationality and moral character" of the individuals in relationship to their society in Karhide (231). Neither editor dwells on the depravity of the leaders on Winter, but emphasizes those qualities important to the model socialist personality among the other inhabitants.

In addition, both editors associate the lack of any sexual inequality in the novel with a lack of property. This central tenet of Marxism, which can be found in Friedrich Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), links the emancipation of women to the establishment of communism (690). According to Heinz Entner, there is no "matriarchy, patriarchy or concept of property" on Winter (231). In his words, the novel enables the reader to consider the institution of sexual partnership under the conditions of domination and oppression as well as freedom, but remains open-ended (232). It is this aspect that led Entner to label Le Guin a "bourgeois-humanist" and a "progressive bourgeois writer" (233).

Interestingly, Le Guin's introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness* first was published in the inaugural volume of the science fiction almanac *Lichtjahr* (Lightyear) in 1980. Erik Simon translated Le Guin's essay in full and accompanied it with a brief biography (168). In an E-mail to the author, he attested that he had not previously known of the forward's existence and wanted to remedy the omission (3-4). From the beginning, Simon, the almanac's editor, endeavored to provide the reader with a variety of stories, essays, bibliographies, and secondary material on science fiction. While the majority of authors in the almanac came from East Germany, other writers from the East Bloc and also from Western countries, such as Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United States, found their place among its pages. Each edition of the almanac included a number of accompanying illustrations as well.

What is perhaps more significant is the essay that preceded Le Guin's introduction in *Lichtjahr*: Vladimir Gakov's "Die Spirale im Werk Ursula Le Guins" (The Spiral in the Work of Ursula Le Guin). Gakov's (a pseudonym for Kovalchuk) critical commentary on Ursula Le Guin's work had two functions: 1) it provided a sanctioned reading of her work, and 2) it informed the reader about a body of work that was inaccessible to most East Germans. Because Le Guin was a Western science fiction author, i.e., doubly marginalized in East Germany, Simon had some difficulty finding scholarly commentary from his own country on her work. His inclusion of a Moscow literary critic, who published on Soviet and international science fiction and fantasy under a pseudonym, demonstrates that western science fiction was also a controversial subject in East Germany's occupying country (*Lichtjahr* 168). At the same time, the
presence of an essay from the Soviet Union served to legitimize Le Guin’s work in the East Bloc.

Secondly, Gakov’s article provides a well-informed overview of Le Guin’s writings and analyzes her political objectives. The “spiral” in the title of his essay refers to the dialectical tendencies that he identifies in her work, particularly in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*. The latter had yet to appear in the Soviet Union or in East Germany. “Every new work is simultaneously a step ahead and a reminiscence of older books and older truths” (169-170): Gakov cites Le Guin’s Taoist elements and Shevek’s belief in the return home as examples of a “philosophy of circular progression” (169-170 and 173). He finds further evidence of this style in *Rocannon’s World, Planet of Exile, City of Illusions*, and the collection *The Wind’s Twelve Quarters*. This was, to my knowledge, the first time these publications had been acknowledged in East German print.

Simultaneously, Gakov is careful to praise the overall quality of Le Guin’s writing while excusing the “influence” of the “New Left” on her work, a movement seen unfavorably among ideologues in the East Bloc. In Gakov’s opinion, *Le Guin’s writing eclipsed a failed “New Wave” movement*. He believes her writing survives the test of time and makes it possible to say “good literature” and “science fiction...in one breath” (169). He is “astounded” to discover that *The Dispossessed*, a book from “bourgeois America,” could contain the following Marxist phrase: “Each according to his abilities, each according to his needs” (173). Gakov writes: “Can it be that this western science fiction novel undertakes the unique experiment of developing a communist future?” (174).

However, Oakey quickly disqualifies the anarchist, socialist experiment on Anarres that Shevek represents. In *The Dispossessed*, the Physicist Shevek travels from his native moon Anarres to attempt to reconnect with the planet below, Urras. The novel is “too contrived, precise” and “not entirely true to life,” writes Gakov. In his opinion, the success of the alternative society on Anarres is wholly determined by the extreme conditions of the Urras moon. This harsh reality shelters Anarres from invasion by its neighboring “imperialists.” Consequently, according to Gakov, *The Dispossessed* does not, and ideologically cannot, portray a communism of the future, but rather a “variant of proto-communism. No other social form can survive on the planet” (174). Therefore, where Le Guin might be influenced by the “ideology of the New Left,” she is not an “extremist.” Furthermore, Gakov believes her common categorization as a “Marxist” to be overstated. However, he feels that Le Guin has effectively incorporated elements of Marxism into a critique of capitalism, more so than her colleagues Ray Bradbury, Kurt Vonnegut, or J.G. Ballard (175).

After reading Gakov’s less than conclusive evaluation of Le Guin’s political philosophy, it is not surprising that *The Dispossessed* did not appear in East Germany until 1987. The novel could not have come out in the seventies
due its outright problematization of the societal stagnation on Anarres. At the
time, this characterization paralleled actual criticism of the East German
economy too closely. Even into the eighties, a novel, which the censor deemed
to metaphorically challenge SED policy, particularly from a Western author,
remained unpublishable.

In the actual application process in 1986, Karin Baier, the primary editor,
leaves the controversial issues to the lengthy outside review. Instead, she em­
phasizes how Le Guin's novel fits into the East German ideological project.
Baier notes Le Guin's "dialectic" writing style referring indirectly to the Gakov
article. Baier also remarks that Le Guin does not incorporate the grotesque
and, therefore, does not stray too far from what is "real" in socialism. Nor
does the novel provide a positive portrayal of the inhabitants of A-Io on Urras,
the capitalist parallel in the story (6). Baier refers to an afterward to be pub­
lished with the translation designed to guide readers along the "correct" path
of interpretation. Finally, Baier recommends the novel with the following:

Due to the depth of Le Guin's bourgeois beliefs in tolerance, she is way ahead of
the contemporaries of her environment. Reference to these ideas in a time of atomic
threat from chauvinist and imperialist powers (i.e., the United States) presents an
opportunity for discussion. (6)

The external review from Wolfgang Holtkamp, an English professor, ad­
dresses Le Guin's intricate depiction of Anarres head on. This well-written
review focuses on the novel's critique of capitalism far more than its ambiva­
ience towards the experiment on Anarres and does not even mention the com­
munist dictatorship of Thu. Holtkamp stresses the portrayal of "militarism,
racism, misogyny, and environmental destruction" in the bourgeois society of
A-Io (9). In short, he sees Le Guin's novel as one answer to his belief that
capitalism in the twentieth century not only restricted the individual, but also
destroyed a person both physically and psychologically (7).

Once this aspect is established conclusively, Holtkamp introduces Anarres
in glowing terms. He emphasizes the peaceful nature of a planet whose chil­
dren are reared in collectives, whose inhabitants possess little, and whose lan­
guage has no possessive pronoun.

Still, he does outline the problem that plagues Anarres:

The energy of the foundational years has dissipated and the danger of stagnation threatens.... There is a growing bureaucracy on the planet together with an increasing isolation from other planets, particularly Urras, and its capitalist and socialist
countries. (13)

In the eighties, many GDR citizens recognized this state of affairs also to be true
of East Germany. However, rather than draw this parallel, Holtkamp explains it
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away as an anarchic flaw. Like his Russian colleague Gakov, he criticizes the "anarchic utopianism" of the "New Left" movement from the sixties. "Spontaneity does not guarantee freedom" (13). Holtkamp explains what he decrees to be the "failure" of the New Left to bring about change from within. Its political dead end, he says, led to the publication of a series of novels which critique this situation. He believes Le Guin's presentation of a directionless anarchic-radical movement on Anares to be such a response.

Furthermore, Holtkamp discovers a communist revolutionary in Shevek and casts him in the role of the resistance fighter. This GDR trope calls upon images of past anti-fascist heroes. It is the model socialist personality who rallies the worker, "provokes social confrontation," and brings change to a system that is no longer valid. In this manner, Holtkamp incorporates Shevek into the East German national myth as an appropriate ideological model for the book's readers.

When selecting an outside reviewer, editors had to choose carefully in order to find a name that sent the correct signal to the application review board. Writing by "safe" authors, particularly those whose work had already appeared, required little specific qualifications or clout on the part of the reviewer. If the editor desired to publish a controversial book, she had to find the appropriate outside opinion. In reference to his efforts to publish Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Ekkehard Redlin writes that the Ministry of Culture turned down the first individuals he suggested, saying they were "incompetent." He finally found an acceptable and respected senior professor (Bussewitz), who delivered Redlin's desired "strong" letter of support. Similarly, Erik Simon attests to the necessity of finding "someone trustworthy outside the field of SF" for the afterward to *The Dispossessed* (E-mail 3). Since science fiction remained suspect in the eyes of many cultural officials through 1990, a review from a person not associated with this subculture was more favorable. This aspect was particularly important in the case of the afterward, which Simon attests was designed unofficially to guide the censor's reading of a novel as much as the consumer's (E-mail 3).

Arnold Schölzel's ten-page afterward for *The Dispossessed* does just that. As if creating room for the physical and philosophical appearance of the novel itself, Schölzel's primary supporting rationale is an argument regarding the dangers of parochial thought. First, he addresses any lingering doubt as to the quality of the science fiction genre itself. Schölzel emphasizes science fiction's ability to "fantasize in a rational manner" (435), echoing earlier justifications from the sixties that encoded the genre as one appropriate to a state dedicated to scientific socialism. Each time he does so in the context of science fiction's valuable ability to break down "thought barriers" and "cognitive limitations" (435). "Ursula Le Guin does not work against science, but rather against one-dimensional thought in science" (436). A further equation reinforces the danger of narrow-mindedness
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to the literary world as well. “Literary quality + undogmatic worldview = good science fiction.” A doctrinaire approach to publishing decisions compromised the nature of the publications.

Yet, whose dogmatic point of view is this essay referring to? Throughout the piece, Schöölzel continually ascribes this approach to Le Guin’s own circumstances within the United States. For instance, Le Guin’s attack against one-dimensional scientific thinking is an attack against “the prevailing direction in Anglo-Saxon philosophy” (436). According to Schöölzel, Le Guin’s novel investigates, which “societal laws actually work.” He immediately negates potential critique of the East German system, by emphasizing that she asked this question “in the hemisphere in which she writes.” In the United States, her critics label her a “Marxist” in retribution, Schöölzel writes (439). Here, he quickly denies this status to Le Guin and distances any association of her literature with the politics of East Germany (439).

Like Holtkamp, Schöölzel treats the failing society on Anarres as an anarchic aberration. He locates the history of anarchism within Western philosophy as a false alternative to capitalism. Consequently, he reasons, Le Guin couches her critique of the United States in the character of Shevek and in Annares’ failed anarchism. This is, he cites from Gakov, the product of her dialectical thought process (437). According to Schöölzel, Shevek diagnoses the following with the help of European philosophy:

> The spread of stagnation and bureaucratic paralysis in a society based on dynamicism; the isolation of this society from its environment, although everything in it is based on openness and communication; the coexistence of rationality and irrationality—in the individual, in the society, in the galaxy. (439)

In yet another example, Schöölzel’s makes numerous references to Shevek’s desire to “tear down walls” (Mauern einreißen) (435, 440, 441) in the context of the necessity for critical thought.

Despite his argumentation, what is so remarkable about Schöölzel’s essay is its use of wording that appears to refer directly to the political and economic situation in East Germany. The words “stagnation” and “bureaucracy” often accompanied internal tacit critique of the GDR in the seventies and eighties. In addition, Schöölzel’s method of argumentation was not new to the field of science fiction. Since the sixties, authors had displaced critique of East Germany into other spaces and times. Readers, as mentioned earlier, eventually learned to “read between the lines” for metaphorical references to East Germany. This strategy also enabled writers to insert suspense and conflict into the capitalist cities in their writing, when they were not allowed to take place within the socialist world. Writers from Eberhardt Del Antonio in the fifties to Gerd Prokop’s popular science fiction/detective novels in the eighties took
advantage of this narrative device. In hindsight, one wonders if Schöbelz's essay were not meant both for the ideologue accustomed to a doctrinaire line of reasoning and for the "knowing" reader to "read between the lines." Certainly, the author had no idea how literal Shevek's demand would become two years later when the Berlin Wall fell.

At first, it may be surprising to discover that an East Bloc country would publish Western science fiction. As this essay demonstrates however, this action was, in part, a political strategy intended to stem the demand for all things western by GDR citizens. By providing the public, with approved western literature, the Ministry of Culture hoped to satisfy curiosity about the West and reinforce the Social Unity Party's worldview. Yet, without the initiative of several well-read editors with great interest in the genre, it is likely that Western science fiction would never have appeared in the country. Their desire to expose GDR readers to a greater variety of international science fiction combined with an adroit knowledge of the workings of the publishing industry enabled them to convince the censor that Ursula Le Guin's two novels were appropriate to broader SED initiatives. As a result, the overall quality of East German science fiction improved as authors were exposed to a variety of imported traditions. If anything, demand grew until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Today, West and East Berlin fans, who used to meet discreetly whenever possible, now exchange books freely during meetings of the fan club Andymon.

Notes

1. Illinois Wesleyan University made the research for this article possible through an Artistic and Scholarly Development Grant. I wish to thank the archivists at the German National Archive (Bundesarchiv) in Berlin for their assistance in finding the documents I needed.

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3. See "Abstract" 2. All translations are those of the author.

4. See Nagl, *Science Fiction in Deutschland* 204. See also Rosemary Scott’s article on American Science Fiction films imported into East Germany.

5. The best known include stories by authors Johanna and Günter Braun, Christa Wolf, Franz Fühmann, Günter Kunert, and Angela and Karlheinz Steinhüller.

6. In the eighties, author Carlos Rasch wrote several episodes of a planned television series entitled "Die Raumlotsen," but the series never materialized. To my knowledge, this was the only GDR plan for a science fiction television series.

7. Sigmund Jähn became the first East German in space in August 1978 (Kaiser and Welck 404).

8. In several discussions with Andymon fan club members while conducting research in Berlin in 1998 and 1999, the quality of a puzzle or thought game posed in science fiction was mentioned as part of the enjoyment of reading. In addition, I prefer to use the term "thought game" to the more common "thought experiment" used in the United States. This is a direct translation of the German *Gedankenspiel*. To the best of my knowledge, the two terms have similar meanings.

9. In a letter to this author, Redlin stated that he was, at the time, trying to get Bradbury’s book published. He would convince his publisher and then the Ministry of Culture finally to publish Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* in DNB one year later.

10. One exception is the 1966 anthology *Marsmenschen*, which was published by DNB.

11. See Neumann’s *Grosses Buch der DDR Science Fiction*.

12. Erik Simon notes that American and British publishing houses sold the translation rights to West German publishers in terms of “German” publishers. Therefore, DNB had to purchase the rights from the West German publisher. A Czechoslovak publisher, on the other hand, could deal directly with the original publisher often for much less money. DNB also had less access to hard currency than the publisher Volk und Welt, which was the publishing house assigned to do foreign literature. Volk and Welt published very little science fiction (Letter 1).

13. Le Guin’s introduction to her own writing outlines her definition of science fiction and her role as a writer of the genre. She emphasizes that her book is not “extrapolative,” but rather a “thought-experiment” (*Left Hand* i-ii). It is not her job to foretell the future, like the weather bureau or the Rand Corporation, she writes (ii-iii). Rather, she searches for the truth by creating a “descriptive” narrative through which she tries to say “what cannot be said in words.” As the literary artist, Le Guin believes fiction exists as a metaphor. “A metaphor for what? If I could have said it non-metaphorically, I would not have written all these words, this novel” (vi).

14. In addition to the two novels, two short stories by Ursula Le Guin appeared in East Germany: “Things” or “The End” (as “Dinge,” 1970) and “Darkness Box” (as “Ein Kasten voll Dunkelheit,” 1963). Both stories were published in the science fiction almanac *Lichtjahr 5* in 1986 along with a selection of East German, Slovakian, Russian, and Dutch authors. The two stories were followed by an essay on fantasy by Erik Simon entitled: "The Sister of the Fairy Tale." "Things" is a tale of creative survival amidst an apocalypse of human design. Its protagonist, Lif, refuses to give up his belief in islands that are rumored to exist further out to sea. Since he lacks the
technology and materials to build a boat, he builds a bridge out of his remaining bricks. At the last minute, a boat from "the Islands" appears in order to save them from drowning at the end of the inadequate bridge. The world has ended, but only for those who believed it must end. In "Darkness Box," time stops, when a power-hungry king traps the night in a box and throws it out to sea. A subservient, noble prince defends his father’s kingdom again and again from his renegade brother. Tired from the endless repetition, the prince opens the “darkness box,” which a little boy found in the ocean and brought to him. The shadows reemerge and time restarts. This time, one of the brothers will die.

15. Simon writes that this was the only essay that he had available on Le Guin and that it did not cost anything (E-mail 4). He also writes: “Le Guin was our own discovery…. She was much underrepresented in the Soviet Union” (5). The majority of Le Guin’s works were available in German translation in West Germany. Some East Germans had greater access to foreign publications than others. Party status often helped. Many authors, academics, and editors did as well.

16. Afterwards were common in the late forties, fifties and sixties during the fledgling years of GDR science fiction. However, they were unusual in the seventies and eighties in novels by East Bloc authors.

17. See Redlin, Letter 1. See also Bussewitz.

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