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‘Extended Arm of Reich Foreign Policy’? Literary Internationalism, Cultural Diplomacy and the First German PEN Club in the Weimar Republic

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This article examines the first German PEN Club (established in 1924) as a semi-formal agent of cultural diplomacy after the First World War. It shows that leading figures in the German PEN negotiated a role in the International PEN which blended PEN’s ostensibly non-political literary internationalism with the national interests of the young Weimar Republic. It explores their mutually expedient relationship with the German Foreign Ministry their efforts to influence state cultural diplomacy and their use of the International PEN framework to test alternative visions of international order. The article complicates the notion that PEN was an ‘instrument’ or ‘extended arm’ of foreign policy by underlining the agency of PEN intellectuals and by showing how PEN was part of a wider search for new ways to shape international affairs and find ideological compromise in an era often seen through a dominant lens of confrontation and polarisation.

In 1927 Walter von Molo, a prominent figure in the German literary establishment, resigned from the committee of the German PEN Club. The German section of the international writers’ association had been officially founded in 1924, after a challenging start amidst post-war tensions, especially during the Ruhr crisis of 1923. By the time Molo resigned in 1927, though, the German PEN was considered by International PEN secretary, Hermon Ould, to be ‘one of the most flourishing and influential of all the PEN Clubs’.¹ Until now Molo had served as a loyal founding member and moderate voice within the German PEN, endorsing the club as a way to facilitate ‘debate with foreign writers’, re-establish Germany’s reputation as a revered ‘*Kulturnation*’ after the vicious cultural battles of the First World War and find middle ground between polarised nationalist and internationalist attitudes within the German literary sphere.² At the heart of Molo’s resignation, as he privately admitted, was his objection to German PEN delegates acting as ‘quasi-officials for the [German] Foreign Ministry’; in his eyes ‘the PEN-Club idea’ could ‘only be realised with the greatest objectivity’ and on a strictly ‘honorary’ basis.³ By contrast, Molo’s interlocutor and PEN committee colleague, the *völkisch*-nationalist Hans Friedrich Blunck, saw PEN as ‘a matter of German propaganda and enlightenment’ and claimed he was motivated to take a more active role after talking to a state official at his first PEN Club meeting.⁴ Moreover, Blunck was convinced that PEN representatives of all nationalities were acting ‘on

¹ PEN (Ould) to PEN German Centre (Berlin), 11 Jan. 1927, PEN Letters, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin (hereafter HRC).

² Walter von Molo, contribution to the survey ‘Was erwarten Sie von der Berliner Tagung des PEN-Klubs? Eine Umfrage unter Berliner Mitgliedern und Nichtmitgliedern’, *Die Literarische Welt*, 14 May 1926, 2. All translations are my own.

³ See Molo to Hans Friedrich Blunck, 24 June 1927, Hans Friedrich Blunck Nachlass, Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesbibliothek, Kiel (hereafter HFBN), Cb92.64.1:2:12,135.

⁴ Blunck, *Tagebuch*, 25 Apr. 1925, HFBN.

behalf of or in cooperation with their foreign ministries'.⁵ Whereas Molo's argument correlated with the non-political (or apolitical) internationalism commonly associated with the early PEN Club – a self-image conjured particularly by International PEN's first president, John Galsworthy⁶ – Blunck's position appeared to contradict the PEN ideal, making it a vehicle not just for national interests but for state-sponsored cultural diplomacy, if not outright propaganda.

These contrasting stances capture two sides of a debate waged over the fundamental character and purpose of interwar organisations like the PEN Club, which preoccupied contemporaries and has shaped historiographical discussion since. In one of the few scholarly treatments of the Weimar-era PEN, Ernst Fischer suggests that Blunck's encounter with the Foreign Ministry official and Molo's reasons for resigning were 'indicative', respectively, of the 'close alliance of literature and foreign policy' in the early German PEN Club and its 'instrumentalisation' on the part of, or at least on behalf of, German foreign policy.⁷ Similarly, Fischer sees President Hindenburg's reception of leading PEN members, Ludwig Fulda and Hermann Sudermann – who had also been co-instigators and co-authors of the notorious 'Manifesto of the 93' in 1914⁸ – as official recognition and confirmation of PEN's role as a 'pacemaker' and 'extended arm' of the German Reich's external policy, which at that time had less 'scope for influence' than the international writers' association.⁹ While these metaphors arguably illustrate differing degrees of proximity between PEN and the German state – as an object, a vanguard or an elongated limb – they each imply that the non-governmental literary organisation was not only closely aligned with but also subordinated to the goals of official post-war foreign policy. As such, they risk obscuring more complex motivations and processes underpinning the workings of PEN, thereby diminishing the agency and integrity of non-state actors who linked the seemingly separate spheres of literary internationalism and cultural diplomacy in a variety of ways.

The present article seeks to complicate our understanding of PEN's contested nature and role in the Weimar era and contends that it was simultaneously much more and much less than an 'extended arm' or 'instrument' of Reich foreign policy. At a time when Germany's capacity to conduct conventional foreign policy was indeed otherwise greatly curtailed, PEN brought together diverse private and state-affiliated actors who sought to facilitate cross-border relations in order to (re-)connect the Weimar Republic with the wider world and pursue a range of professional, national and international ambitions in the process. The article shows that neither PEN's literary internationalism nor the emerging field of cultural diplomacy with which it intersected were passive or blunt instruments subordinated to the will of the state. Rather, they were part of a wider search for new ways to shape and conduct international affairs after a devastating world war and in the face of unprecedented challenges and crises in the cultural and political spheres. These questions were particularly important for Weimar Germany, whose political and intellectual elites placed cultural tradition and innovation at the heart of post-war recovery and the nation building process of a new republic built on the 'Spirit of Weimar' instead of the 'Spirit of Potsdam'.¹⁰

In recent years scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the dynamics of cultural internationalism and intellectual cooperation in post-war reconstruction and reconciliation.¹¹ Alongside

⁵ Blunck, *Tagebuch*, 25 June 1929, HFBN.

⁶ See R.A. Wilford, 'The PEN Club, 1930–1950', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14, 1 (1979), 115 fn. 2; Megan Doherty, 'A "Guardian to Literature and its Cousins": The Early Politics of the PEN Club', *Nederlandse Letterkunde*, 16, 3 (2011), 132–51.

⁷ Ernst Fischer, 'Das Zentrum in der Weimarer Republik: Von der Gründung bis zur Auflösung unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft (1923–1933)' in Dorothee Bores and Sven Hanuschek, eds., *Handbuch PEN: Geschichte und Gegenwart der deutschsprachigen Zentren* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenburg, 2014), 71–132 (here 78 and 80 fn. 30).

⁸ Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg and Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg, *Der Aufruf „An die Kulturwelt“: Das Manifest der 93 und die Anfänge der Kriegspropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996).

⁹ Fischer, 'Zentrum', 80.

¹⁰ Georg Bollenbeck, *Tradition, Avantgarde, Reaktion. Deutsche Kontroversen um die kulturelle Moderne 1880–1945* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1999), 194–8.

¹¹ Seminal in this regard was Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

other forms internationalism, numerous educational, scientific and artistic initiatives emerged which aimed to strengthen cross-national cooperation, promote peace, and help (re-)shape the international order.¹² While many of these schemes had their roots in nineteenth-century internationalisms, the catastrophic breakdown of relations during the war imbued such ideas with greater urgency in its aftermath, resulting in a proliferation of more formal and institutionalised programmes and projects, as well as semi-formal and private transnational networks of varying ideological hues. As early as 1918, for example, the French pacifist intellectuals Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse spearheaded movements to cultivate and harness an ‘international spirit’ to overcome the divisions of the previous four years.¹³ Within the new League of Nations two cultural agencies were established: the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, in 1922, initially comprising ‘twelve members of significant stature in intellectual life’; and the Paris-based International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, established in 1926 with the financial support of the French government.¹⁴ These official bodies interacted, in turn, with a wide range of other international organisations, such as the International Confederation of Students, which was founded in 1919 as a kind of ‘Students’ League of Nations’ and promoted mobility and exchange amongst young ‘intellectuals in the making’.¹⁵ In this context, the International PEN has also attracted new scholarly interest as a ‘literary league of nations’ whose leaders sought to create and consolidate a framework for an ‘imagined Republic of Letters’.¹⁶

Research on these organisations highlights several important, interrelated aspects which found expression or variation across the sphere of intellectual cooperation. Firstly, as products of the liberal international order established at the Paris Peace Conference, their organisational structures and ambitions encapsulated not only the tensions but also the entanglements between internationalism and nationalism which characterised the era as a whole.¹⁷ Secondly, these tensions were also manifest in claims to artistic or scientific universalism which coincided with notions of national specificity and rootedness. And, thirdly, by combining intellectual and cultural activities with political and diplomatic pursuits – albeit with different emphases and degrees of intervention – they blurred the boundaries between these ostensibly separate spheres in various, often paradoxical ways.

Similar themes emerge in the related but somewhat distinct field of cultural diplomacy. Here, recent histories explore the relationship between the efforts of state and/or non-state actors to export or mobilise cultural assets, in order to promote national interests and cultivate relations with other nations and regions.¹⁸ As the contributions to this special issue show, the interwar period was an early heyday for these kind of activities which have been variously categorised – along a broad semantic spectrum – as forms of ‘propaganda, nation branding, soft power and public

¹² Daniel Laqua, ‘Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations and the Problem of Order’, *Journal of Global History*, 6, 2 (2011), 223–47; Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017); Daniel Laqua, ed., *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); for the European context, Carlis Reijnen and Marleen Rensen, eds., *European Encounters: Intellectual Exchange and the Rethinking of Europe 1914–1945* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014).

¹³ David James Fisher, *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 51–78; Paul Michael Lützeler, *Die Schriftsteller und Europa. Von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart*, 2nd edn (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1992), 272–7.

¹⁴ Laqua, ‘Transnational’, 224.

¹⁵ Daniel Laqua, ‘Activism in the “Students’ League of Nations”: International Student Politics and the Confédération Internationale des Étudiants, 1919–1939’, *English Historical Review*, 132, 556 (2017), 607.

¹⁶ Doherty, ‘Guardian’, esp. 141. See also Hans Vandevoorde and Christoph Verbruggen, ‘Inleiding. De PEN-club: ‘a world-parliament of literature’, *Nederlandse Letterkunde*, 16, 3 (2011), 123–31; Megan Doherty, ‘PEN International and its Republic of Letters, 1921–1979’, PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 2011.

¹⁷ Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Peter Weber, ‘Ernst Jäckh and the National Internationalism of Interwar Germany’, *Central European History*, 52, 3 (2019), 402–23.

¹⁸ See Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Mark Donfried, eds., *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Berghahn, 2010); Charlotte Faucher, ‘Cultural Diplomacy and International Cultural Relations in Twentieth-Century Europe’, *Contemporary European History*, 25 (2016), 373–85.

diplomacy'.¹⁹ In Weimar Germany, pre-war discussions about cultural foreign affairs were resumed with greater urgency in the wake of military defeat, political revolution and the punitive peace settlement. Wartime cultural mobilisation had left the international reputation of German culture in tatters and resulted in a cycle of boycotts and counter-boycotts between representatives of the victorious and vanquished nations. In this context, the concept and practice of Weimar cultural diplomacy was shaped by the notion that *Kultur* was both a means and an end of post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation. The foundation of the Foreign Ministry's own cultural department in 1920 gave formal institutional expression to the increased emphasis on external cultural policy (*auswärtige Kulturpolitik*).²⁰ Opinions differed on the extent to which this was an independent wing of foreign policy or one that was subordinated to particular political and economic interests.²¹ Nevertheless, there was widespread consensus 'that culture could be used to restore Germany's authority on the world stage'.²² Given the sensitivity surrounding state influence in cultural affairs after the propaganda battles of the war, as well as the republic's severe financial constraints, official cultural diplomacy relied upon and often took its cue from private or semi-autonomous actors engaged in diverse fields such as student and academic exchange, German language promotion and art exhibitions.²³ Thus, Weimar Germany's cultural relations – to use the broader term preferred by scholars such as Frank Trommler – were conducted by a multitude of organisations, institutes and societies, which interacted to varying degrees, if at all, with state institutions and which employed a spectrum of competing and/or overlapping concepts of national and international culture.²⁴ Within this burgeoning field of Weimar cultural diplomacy and relations, the PEN Club is yet to undergo detailed examination.²⁵

This study situates the Weimar-era PEN Club at the intersection between these histories and historiographies of cultural internationalism and diplomacy. Beginning with a brief discussion of International PEN's place at the interface of post-war (geo-)politics and culture, the article then gives a detailed account of the origins and development of the German PEN group, emphasising the challenges its early leaders faced in negotiating lingering post-war tensions and navigating differing but interrelated forms of nationalism and internationalism which interacted and collided during the 1920s. In a third step, the article interrogates the German PEN committee's efforts to exert influence on state cultural diplomacy and to use the PEN organisation to assert German leadership and test alternative visions of international order. Highlighting this previously neglected case study enables us to foreground the agency of intellectual actors in relation to state foreign policy and understand the place of different expressions of internationalism in Weimar cultural diplomacy. In doing this, the article also contributes to recent trends in historiography of the Weimar Republic, by emphasising PEN's difficult balancing act and search for compromise in an era whose divisions, while real and serious, are often read backwards from the 1930s.²⁶

¹⁹ Faucher, 'Cultural Diplomacy', 377.

²⁰ Kurt Düwell, *Deutschlands auswärtige Kulturpolitik 1918–1932: Grundlinien und Dokumente* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1976).

²¹ See Carl Heinrich Becker, *Kulturpolitische Aufgaben des Reiches* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1919); Düwell, *Auswärtige Kulturpolitik*, 28–38.

²² Anthony McElligott, *Rethinking the Weimar Republic: Authority and Authoritarianism, 1916–1936* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 191–2.

²³ Holger Impekoven, *Die Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung und das Ausländerstudium in Deutschland 1925–1945. Von der "geräuschlosen Propaganda" zur Ausbildung der "geistigen Wehr" des "Neuen Europa"* (Bonn: V&R unipress, 2013); Volkhard Laitenberger, *Akademischer Austausch und auswärtige Kulturpolitik. Der Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst (DAAD) 1923–1945* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1976); Eckhard Michels, *Von der Deutschen Akademie zum Goethe-Institut. Sprach- und auswärtige Kulturpolitik 1923–1960* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005); Carolin Schober, *Das Auswärtige Amt und die Kunst in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2004).

²⁴ See Frank Trommler, *Kulturmacht ohne Kompass: Deutsche auswärtige Kulturbeziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 289–418.

²⁵ Despite his emphasis on the alliance between literature and foreign policy, Fischer's handbook article does not use the term 'auswärtige Kulturpolitik' or any of its German variants which correspond with the English-language concept 'cultural diplomacy'; indeed, exploring the precise nature of PEN's relationship to the state is not the purpose of his chapter.

²⁶ For an assessment of recent developments in Weimar historiography, see Jochen Hung, "'Bad" Politics and "Good" Culture: New Approaches to the History of the Weimar Republic', *Central European History*, 49, 3–4 (2016), 441–53.

At the Interface of (Geo-)Politics and Culture: PEN in Post-War Europe

The International PEN was established in 1921 by the British writer Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, who envisaged the venture as an 'international dinner club' for Poets, Essayists and Novelists that would 'draw the nations together' to create a kind of 'United States of Europe and America in literature'.²⁷ Troubled by the breakdown of international intellectual relations and the part played by intellectuals in wartime propaganda battles, Dawson Scott and club president Galsworthy sought to foster a 'PEN spirit' of a 'broad, open, friendly mind', which they believed would enable their organisation to transcend the fraught world of politics.²⁸ Their objectives were, of course, innately political, aimed at 'nothing short of preventing another Great War'.²⁹ But in an era of great national and ideological rivalries, PEN's leaders aimed to fashion the club around an ethos of 'friendly cosmopolitanism',³⁰ a 'common rights conception of nationalism'³¹ and a liberal belief that the 'health of civil society could be secured without recourse to political alignment'.³²

From its inception, then, PEN's deliberately ambiguous foundational ethos bequeathed the organisation with a set of inherent tensions, which permeated the cultural and diplomatic spheres more broadly. The rhetoric, if not practice, of excluding politics from the club's cultural and literary business was a deliberate self-staging strategy which positioned PEN and its members above and beyond the political sphere as the very basis and prerequisite for the desired political and diplomatic influence. PEN's 'ultimate purpose', Megan Doherty argues, was to 'transmit the wisdom gained from cultural authority to political leaders'.³³ This not only entailed drawing on historical claims to the autonomy and universalism of literature as an art form, but also 'borrow[ing] nationalist discourses and mimick[ing] institutional practices that typified the political sphere', which could be clearly seen in its stylisation as a 'world-Parliament of literature' and its simultaneously supra-national and national structure and ethos.³⁴ The view from PEN's leaders, then, was that writers had an active role to play both as ambassadors between nations and between the cultural and political fields.³⁵

Having held their inaugural dinner in October 1921, PEN's first executive committee set about encouraging writers in other countries to establish their own national centres and inviting distinguished authors from across Europe and North America to become honorary members of the English centre.³⁶ The fact that these included German playwrights Gerhart Hauptmann and Hermann Sudermann, both signatories of the 'Manifesto of the 93' – alongside such renowned writers as Thomas Hardy, Edith Wharton, Georg Brandes, Romain Rolland, Anatole France, Maxim Gorky, Knut Hamsun, Arthur Schnitzler and Gabriele d'Annunzio – was an early sign of PEN's openness to representatives of both allies and former enemies, including nationalist figures who had outspokenly supported their countries' military campaigns. The first centres founded outside England were in Stockholm, Paris, Brussels and New York. By 1924 nineteen PEN sections had been established – including the German PEN – and by 1926 the number had reached twenty-three.³⁷ While the original English centre provided a model, each group was developed and run independently as constituent parts of the international umbrella organisation, which came together annually, from 1923, at PEN's International Congresses, hosted each year by a different member nation.

²⁷ Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, quoted in Marjorie Watts, *P.E.N. The Early Years 1921–1926* (London: Archive Press Watts, 1971), 13.

²⁸ John Galsworthy, 'Danksagung', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 27 May 1926.

²⁹ Doherty, 'Guardian', 146.

³⁰ Rachel Potter, 'Modernist Rights: International PEN 1921–1936', *Critical Quarterly*, 55, 2 (2013), 78.

³¹ Doherty, 'Guardian', 145.

³² *Ibid.*, 138.

³³ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁶ Watts, *P.E.N.*, 15–9.

³⁷ Potter, 'Modernist Rights', 72; Doherty, 'Guardian', 149.

The similarities between PEN and the League of Nations were striking and not coincidental. However, there were also important, if subtle, differences between PEN and the League's own organs for intellectual cooperation. For one thing, PEN was 'more independent', according to Rachel Potter, 'because it was neither tied to a mother organisation nor funded by the British government'.³⁸ At the same time, Christophe Verbruggen suggests that, unlike the League's Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, PEN's literary focus meant it was 'not defined by a dialogue between major "civilisations"' but rather 'between autonomous literatures'.³⁹ Despite efforts to cultivate a PEN organisation that was culturally inclusive and ostensibly apolitical, it nevertheless reflected the structural hierarchies between large literatures and small literatures that characterised the 'world republic of letters',⁴⁰ as well as corresponding imbalances between and amongst the great powers and smaller nations which shaped the geo-political order.

To some extent these cultural and geo-political disparities appeared to affect the degree of state interest and involvement in PEN's various national contexts. On the one hand, Verbruggen suggests, for example, that 'there were few indications of direct political involvement in PEN by the great powers' because 'the symbolic significance of PEN was too small to warrant it'.⁴¹ On the other hand, Andrea Orzoff has shown that Czech intellectuals 'worked hand in hand with the propaganda section of Edvard Benes's Ministry of Foreign Affairs', under whose auspices the Prague PEN was established in 1924, and which 'provided and coordinated funding for the new organisation'.⁴² 'In contrast to London', Orzoff writes, 'most European intellectuals East of the Rhine viewed PEN as another political arena for defending the interests and needs of their insecure states'; representatives of the 'successor states jockeyed for power and wooed great power intellectuals in PEN just as their diplomatic corps did with great power politicians in Geneva, Paris and London'.⁴³ Any implication that PEN's 'great power intellectuals' west of the Rhine were entirely independent should be treated with caution, however, as indeed it was in some German circles. For instance, the French PEN secretary, Benjamin Crémieux, was also director of the Italian bureau in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, suggesting that here, too, PEN shared links with the state apparatus.⁴⁴ The contrasting case of the Bulgarian PEN Club, established in 1926, illustrates yet another variant: representing a vanquished and unstable nation that was lacking both 'world-famous writers' and a state agency like the propaganda section of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, the Bulgarian PEN 'was – for better or worse – autonomous, an initiative of individuals never fully embraced by the authorities'.⁴⁵ According to Irina Gigova, the absence of state support 'undermined its effectiveness' but enabled Bulgarian writers to use the PEN network 'as free agents' in a bid to put Bulgarian literature on the map and 'engage in a cultural diplomacy of their own, proving Bulgaria's rightful place among cultured nations'.⁴⁶ If direct cooperation with the state contradicted International PEN's apparently 'apolitical mission', as Orzoff suggests,⁴⁷ these brief examples cited here demonstrate that it is equally, if not more, important to understand how the goal of using cultural authority to exert (foreign) political influence was inflected and found differing models according to particular national circumstances.

³⁸ Potter, 'Modernist Rights', 71.

³⁹ Christophe Verbruggen, 'Hoe literair internationalisme organiseren? De 'vervlochten' geschiedenis van de Belgische PEN-club (1922–1931)', *Nederlandse Letterkunde*, 16, 3 (2011), 153.

⁴⁰ Irina Gigova, 'The Bulgarian PEN Club: A Study in Interwar Cultural Internationalism', *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 20, 10 (2019), 3.

⁴¹ Verbruggen, 'Internationalisme', 153.

⁴² Andrea Orzoff, 'Prague PEN and Central European Cultural Nationalism 1924–1935', *Nationalities Papers*, 29, 2 (2001), 243–4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁴⁴ René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: Volume 8 French, Italian and Spanish Criticism, 1900–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 41.

⁴⁵ Gigova, 'Bulgarian PEN Club', 3 and 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁷ Orzoff, 'Prague PEN', 243.

Like the Weimar state which succeeded the Kaiserreich, the German PEN occupied an ambiguous position between emerging nation and great power status. Its members represented a fledgling republic seeking to establish its identity and legitimacy at home and abroad, as well as a former great empire and world-renowned cultural powerhouse aspiring to reassert its leading role on the international stage. As a result, the German PEN was the site of on-going negotiation between the kind of great power internationalism represented by PEN's British leaders, who could afford to cultivate their professed non-political ethos, and the nation building projects of the smaller European nations, whose agendas appeared to be more closely aligned with the interests of their states, regardless of whether they had official institutional support.

Representing Weimar: Establishing and Expanding the German PEN Club

Against the backdrop of diplomatic crisis and cultural blockade in the early 1920s, it is hardly surprising that it took two years to establish the German PEN, firmly and officially, as part of the wider International PEN organisation.⁴⁸ Having already invited Hauptmann and Sudermann to be honorary members of the English centre, PEN's General Secretary Hermon Ould visited Germany in 1922 to encourage the foundation of a German PEN section.⁴⁹ Whereas other instances of early post-war contact came about in the guise of humanitarian and intellectual relief efforts, PEN's gesture of friendship towards German writers stood out in its open attempt to bring writers together in the interests of international understanding.⁵⁰ Seemingly against the odds, a small group of German writers recognised the significance and potential benefits of the PEN Club initiative and established a working committee in September 1922.⁵¹ Fragmentary records make it difficult to establish exactly which writers joined the working group and when, but the first official list of founding committee members – which was not sent to the English PEN until March 1924 – included the following names and positions: Ludwig Fulda as chairman, Karl Federn as vice-chairman, Joachim Kühn as secretary and Albert Osterrieth as treasurer, as well as Marie von Bunsen, Harry Graf Kessler, Walter von Molo, Rudolf Presber, Samuel Sänger, Hermann Georg Scheffauer, Hermann Sudermann and Fedor von Zobeltitz.⁵²

If this collective comprised what Ernst Fischer describes as an 'ideological melange, with a surplus of conservative figures',⁵³ it was the Austrian-born writer Karl Federn who spearheaded the working committee's efforts and corresponded with the International PEN on behalf of the nascent German group. Federn had originally trained as a lawyer before becoming a professional author and translator from Italian and English.⁵⁴ During the war he was special correspondent for the liberal *Vossische Zeitung* in Lugano, in neutral Switzerland, and subsequently worked as an aide for the Italian desk in the German Foreign Ministry from 1919 until 1921. In early 1920 he had also been lined up as

⁴⁸ On the post-war cultural blockades, see Brigitte Schroeder-Gudehus, 'Challenge to Transnational Loyalties: International Scientific Organizations after the First World War', *Science Studies*, 3 (1973), 93–118.

⁴⁹ Watts, *P.E.N.*, 19; Fischer, 'Zentrum', 72.

⁵⁰ On the politics of intellectual relief, see Elisabeth Piller, "'Can the Science of the World Allow This?' – German Academic Distress, Foreign Aid and the Cultural Demobilization of the Academic World, 1919–1925", in Marie-Eve Chagnon and Tomás Irish, eds., *The Academic World in the Era of the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 189–211. On the legacies of the war in PEN's early development, see Tara Windsor, 'Between Cultural Conflict and Cultural Contact: German Writers and Cultural Diplomacy in the Aftermath of the First World War', in Nicholas Martin, Tim Haughton and Pierre Purseigle, eds., *Aftermath: Legacies and Memories of War in Europe, 1918–1945–1989* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014), 109–27.

⁵¹ Fischer, 'Zentrum', 71–3.

⁵² Federn to PEN (Marjorie Scott), 27 Mar. 1924, HRC, PEN Recip.; for more detail on these committee members see Fischer, 'Zentrum', 73–8.

⁵³ Fischer, 'Zentrum', 77.

⁵⁴ Federn's main literary works included two volumes of short stories ('Hundert Novellen', 1912/1926 and 1913/1928) and a war novel entitled *Hauptmann Latour* (1929), as well as critical essays and historical studies of Dante (1900), Cardinal Richelieu (1927) and Heinrich von Kleist (1930). In 1933 Federn, who had Jewish ancestry, went into exile in Denmark and later the United Kingdom. See 'Biographical note on Karl Federn', PEN Misc., HRC; Fischer, 'Zentrum', 72–3.

the potential director of a so-called 'Institute for Political Historical Research' which was planned by the Foreign Ministry's War Guilt section, but never came to fruition.⁵⁵ By the time he began laying the foundations for the German PEN Federn had left his official post and returned to his literary pursuits fulltime. As Fischer suggests, Federn's earlier diplomatic experience almost certainly sharpened his understanding of Germany's foreign political concerns and therefore his recognition of PEN's 'potential to be deployed as an 'instrument of foreign policy'.⁵⁶ At the same time, he embodied PEN's ostensible separation of literary and political business, making him an ideal candidate to pursue the organisation's wider goal of mediating between the cultural and political fields. Moreover, faced with fundamental questions over whether and how the German PEN should (be seen to) position itself as an autonomous internationalist organisation or allow itself to become more overtly politicised along nationalist faultlines, Federn sought to guide the group with a pragmatic 'national internationalism' that found various manifestations in Weimar Germany, even if its proponents faced challenging domestic and international conditions.⁵⁷

The postponement of the group's official foundation during the Ruhr crisis of 1923 not only demonstrated how closely PEN was impacted by wider political circumstances but also presented the German committee with an early opportunity to form and assert its agenda within the international organisation and develop its self-understanding as an agent of cultural diplomacy. In response to an invitation to the first International PEN Congress due to take place in London in May 1923, Federn and his colleagues first hesitated and then finally decided against sending German delegates, arguing that although they sympathised entirely with the PEN Club's efforts, 'our own opinions and our regard for the feelings of our fellow countrymen forbid us at this time from offering a cordial hand to members of states, which, even in peacetime, are waging a relentless war against our compatriots on the Rhine and the Ruhr'.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, he insisted that the German members would 'not cease to work in the interests of an international union of intellectual workers' and that they would be pleased to see the next PEN Congress held 'in genuine peacetime on German soil'.⁵⁹ While Belgian PEN members had also sought to veto German participation, the German committee adopted and inserted itself into the dominant discourse of national distress and (innocent) victimhood, albeit couched in a polite language of regret in its otherwise frank correspondence with the PEN leadership in London. While this was not exactly what PEN's British founders had initially envisaged, this apparent stand-off was less bellicose and more discreet than some of the confrontations that plagued the academic sphere.

Despite this act of intellectual passive resistance, Federn remained active, continuing discussions with London and German committee members over ways to facilitate and formalise German participation in the PEN Club. When the New York PEN centre was designated to host the 1924 Congress, Federn approved the location in principle but expressed doubt over the distance, suggesting Bern, Zurich, The Hague or one of the Scandinavian countries as alternatives – away from Europe's 'zone of unrest', as he put it.⁶⁰ This fleeting attempt to redirect PEN's meeting to a politically neutral, but potentially German-friendly, state, may have indicated the German committee's unwillingness to accept decisions made in their absence, but it also reflected the perceived and real importance of the former neutrals as potential mediators at this time.⁶¹ However, Federn's proposals were not taken up; despite his attempts to gain leverage through a selective form of internationalism, the German committee's room for manoeuvre evidently remained limited. On the domestic front, Federn's pragmatic approach was also challenged by Hermann Sudermann, who took a hard-line

⁵⁵ Ulrich Heinemann, *Die verdrängte Niederlage: Politische Öffentlichkeit und Kriegsschuldfrage in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 61.

⁵⁶ Fischer, 'Zentrum', 73.

⁵⁷ Weber, 'Jäckh'.

⁵⁸ Federn to PEN, 20 Apr. 1923, HRC, PEN Recip.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Federn to Galsworthy, 29 July 1923, HRC, PEN Recip.

⁶¹ Rebecka Lettevall, Gerd Somsen and Sven Widmalm, eds., *Neutrality in Twentieth Century Europe: Intersections of Science, Culture, and Politics after the First World War* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

stance as the committee debated its draft statutes in summer 1923. Although he had cautiously accepted his honorary membership of the International PEN in 1922 and continued to emphasise his basic support for PEN's ideals as the Ruhr crisis escalated,⁶² Sudermann argued that the right to block individual foreign guests should be inscribed in the German PEN constitution.⁶³ While Sudermann failed to recognise either the irony or futility of this confrontational approach, Federn was anxious that the committee should not exacerbate Germany's already 'difficult position' but rather take the opportunity to serve the national interest by reconnecting with the wider literary world, sooner rather than later.⁶⁴ Ultimately, Federn recognised that the deeper issue at stake was essentially one of tactics and that cultural diplomacy needed a new veneer after the strident propaganda of the war and immediate post-Versailles period. This way of thinking pre-empted Weimar's 'second phase' of cultural foreign policy that accompanied the so-called Locarno era and the more conciliatory, though nonetheless assertive diplomacy associated with Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann.⁶⁵

Although the German PEN's inaugural dinner would not take place until December 1924, its complex foundational phase had already entered its final stages in March that year. Convinced that wider circumstances now permitted it, Federn informed the London PEN that the German committee would now begin extending the group's membership and work. Reiterating their 'exceptional situation' – a euphemistic signal of the near impossible task of either remaining apolitical or disregarding the national mood as a German writer at this time – he also reaffirmed the shared belief that 'in order to justify its existence and its goal of mutual goodwill in the literary world, the PEN Club must be truly international, literary and unpolitical'.⁶⁶ A cautious resolution of the earlier dispute with Sudermann was evident in Federn's claim that 'as a matter of principle, we welcome members of every nationality, just as you do, and we hope that the circumstances will develop in such a manner that the implementation of this principle does not come up against difficulties in practice'. Likewise, the German group's early statutes captured this balancing act: the first clause combined an equivocal desire or aspiration to 'cultivate literary relations at home and abroad' with an emphatic rejection of 'political purposes', while the final clause declared that members of other national PEN groups were also considered affiliate members of the German group.⁶⁷ Thus, the German group aligned itself with International PEN's overarching philosophy of literary internationalism but also tailored this to take account of the still volatile domestic climate.

In the Weimar context, where anything 'political' was highly contested, PEN's language of 'unpolitics' – however far removed from reality – had the potential to be both unifying and divisive.⁶⁸ Reflecting later on the difficulties facing the German club's initiators, Federn noted: 'for some we were too national, for others too international; from right and left, if you can use these words for a fundamentally unpolitical association, people refused to join or left almost immediately'.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, after its first dinner on 15 December 1924 was attended by twenty-six people – including two guests from Finland and France – the club began hosting regular events for home and foreign writers and its membership steadily grew: by April 1925 it had sixty members, by late 1926 more than 130, and by spring 1927 200.⁷⁰ One of the German PEN's most important recruits was Thomas Mann, who joined the group in February 1925, having already been a visitor at the

⁶² Hermann Sudermann to PEN, 20 July 1922, 6 Mar. 1923 and 21 Apr. 1923, HRC, PEN Recip.

⁶³ Fischer, 'Zentrum', 73.

⁶⁴ Federn to Sudermann, 23 Aug. 1923, quoted in Fischer, 'Zentrum', 73.

⁶⁵ Trommler, *Kulturmacht*, 373–86.

⁶⁶ Federn to PEN (Marjorie Scott), 27 Mar. 1924, HRC, PEN Recip. (and following quotations).

⁶⁷ 'PEN-Klub, Deutsche Gruppe' statutes, undated, in HFBN, Cb92.64.1:1,09,02 and Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter PA AA), R65079.

⁶⁸ See Sabine Marquardt, *Polis contra Polemos. Politik als Kampfbegriff der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1997).

⁶⁹ Karl Federn, 'Von alten und jungen Schriftstellern im PEN-Klub', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 29 May 1926.

⁷⁰ Figures from the following sources respectively: Federn to PEN, 2 Apr. 1925, HRC, PEN Recip.; 'PEN Club – Mitglieder – Verzeichnis' attached to circular from Werner Mahrholz, 10 Nov. 1926, Akademie der Künste, Heinrich-Mann-Archiv 3107; German PEN (Mahrholz) to PEN (Ould), 28 Mar. 1927, HRC, PEN Recip.

Amsterdam branch and the first German writer to attend a PEN dinner in London in May 1924. Mann was effusive about PEN's ideals, which he believed correlated with his own cultural cosmopolitanism that was rooted in German national traditions, and was the guest of several PEN Clubs across Europe in the 1920s and early 1930s, including particularly symbolic appearances in Paris in 1926 and Warsaw in 1927. Although he was a member of the German committee for much of the period, he did not play an active role in organisational matters and hopes that he would become its chairman remained unfulfilled. Nevertheless, Mann's support and prestige was undoubtedly a great asset for the German group, which held an illustrious banquet to celebrate his Nobel Prize in 1929.⁷¹ Thomas' brother Heinrich was another prominent figure who joined the German section in 1925 and was invited by the French PEN as one of six guests of honour at the International PEN Congress held in Paris in May that year. A month later Heinrich Mann was also appointed to the German PEN committee, along with Wilhelm von Scholz, Max Halbe, Josef Ponten and Hans Friedrich Blunck, as part of a drive to include more writers from outside Berlin.⁷² Blunck himself subsequently became an important proponent of regionalism in the German PEN, establishing a subsection in Hamburg in 1926, which was intended to give expression to both the Hanseatic cosmopolitanism and local 'Plattdeutsch' traditions of northern Germany.⁷³ Since new members had to be nominated and invited by the committee, the selectivity and bourgeois character of the 'dinner club' attracted particular criticism from radical left-wing intellectuals.⁷⁴ However, the fact that writers as ideologically and stylistically divergent as Heinrich Mann and Blunck could belong to the same organisation, never mind committee, reflects the concerted efforts made to create a pluralist organisation, in which writers of different ideological leanings and from different cities and regions were represented. This relative diversity made the club more susceptible to internal conflict, but also a site of on-going negotiation and attempted consensus-building, with regard to PEN's specific role as well as the very definitions and conduct of (cultural) internationalism and diplomacy more generally.

Mutual Interests: Literary Officialdom, State Diplomacy and International Order

Although the German group's wider membership included prominent members of international stature, it was often (comparatively) lesser-known figures who actively steered the committee and took care of the club's institutional matters, including its relationship with the German Foreign Ministry. While it is difficult to ascertain how far this state body was directly involved in the formation of the German PEN group, there were certainly a number of professional links from early on. Other than Federn, three members of the German founding committee were directly engaged in diplomatic service during and after the war, each representing a different type of intellectual diplomat: Joachim Kühn, Samuel Sängler and Harry Kessler. Having trained as a journalist, Kühn side-stepped into the Foreign Ministry's press department in 1917 to help fill a gap in qualified personnel working on state propaganda. In 1924 he was appointed to the new post of press and cultural attaché at the German embassy in Paris where he worked closely with Ambassador Leopold von Hoesch and monitored Franco-German cultural relations.⁷⁵ Sängler, meanwhile, was a long-standing editor of the prominent literary-cultural journal *Die Neue Rundschau*; as a Social Democrat, he observed the third anti-war Zimmerwald Conference in Stockholm in 1917 on the Foreign Ministry's behalf and was called on to serve as envoy to Czechoslovakia in 1919. This appointment sought to break with Imperial Germany's tainted diplomatic apparatus and conjure a new spirit of diplomacy between two young republics whose post-war relations were delicate. After returning to work at the Fischer publishing

⁷¹ On Thomas Mann's PEN activities, see Tara Windsor, 'Dichter, Denker, Diplomaten: German Writers and Cultural Diplomacy after the First World War, 1919–1933', PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2013, 188–95.

⁷² Fischer, 'Zentrum', 89.

⁷³ Windsor, 'Dichter', 147–58.

⁷⁴ Fischer, 'Zentrum', 82–5.

⁷⁵ Schober, *Kunst*, 54–5; Johannes Hürter et al., eds., *Biographisches Handbuch des deutschen auswärtigen Dienstes 1871–1945*, Vol. 2 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), 687–8.

house in early 1922, Sanger continued his diplomatic service, first as legation council until 1923 and then on a temporary basis for the press department of the Reich government until 1929.⁷⁶ The liberal-aristocratic art collector and critic Harry Kessler had a multifaceted yet erratic relationship with the Foreign Ministry that was often activated at times of crisis. During the war he oversaw German cultural propaganda at the consulate in Bern, negotiated with French delegations and served briefly as ambassador to Poland in its immediate aftermath. In 1923 he was dispatched to London as a semi-official mediator during the Ruhr crisis and undertook a state-funded lecture tour to the United States. Kessler also attended the League of Nations conference in Geneva in 1924 and developed his own vision of an aesthetic league of nations, which corresponded closely with the PEN idea.⁷⁷ Despite these affinities, Kessler's role and attitude towards the German club was somewhat distant.⁷⁸ The involvement of figures like Kuhn, Sanger and Kessler did not necessarily compromise the German PEN's cultural autonomy, but rather underlined the already fluid boundaries between the intellectual and diplomatic spheres, and arguably enhanced the young club's gravitas and reach. While their dual identities as writer-diplomats were by no means a German peculiarity, their paths show how the generally conservative Foreign Ministry drew on diverse literary or cultural figures when confronted with unprecedented challenges in times of war and peace. At this stage, moreover, it seems that Walter von Molo was satisfied that his colleagues' links with the Foreign Ministry did not impinge on the club's objectives.

The German group's first chairman, Ludwig Fulda, cultivated a different kind of relationship with the Foreign Ministry. In early 1924, while the process of founding the German PEN was still on-going, Fulda approached the ministry's cultural department in his capacity as president of the Association of German Playwrights. Together with his counterparts in the Associations of German Authors and Film Writers, he sought to make a case for the 'systematic integration of German literary representatives and their organisations into German overseas propaganda [*Auslandspropaganda*]'.⁷⁹ General international interest in the German literary sphere was evidenced, Fulda argued, by the fact that the London-based PEN Club 'had tried to make contact with him and the corresponding German writers' associations'.⁸⁰ By approaching officials at the highest level, Fulda and his colleagues were not simply placing themselves in the service of the state but also enlisting the ministry's emerging cultural apparatus for their own interests and to enhance their own influence. Emerging from a crisis-ridden year of hyperinflation and international tensions, their proposals were couched in terms of material, commercial and existential necessity for German writers, but also tied directly to the need for a cultural foreign policy which bolstered 'education about true German mentality and culture', the 'diffusion of the German language abroad', 'rapprochement, compromise, reconciliation' and 'strengthen[ed] the so-called *Auslandsdeutschtum*'.⁸¹ They also argued, citing an unnamed third party, that Gustav Stresemann had shown special interest in 'literary propaganda', on the assumption that 'it does not appear to be as politically biased and is less visible than the otherwise political practices of the embassies and consulates'.⁸² While not all of their proposals could be met, this initiative went some way to intensifying cooperation between leading literary functionaries, the Foreign Ministry and German embassies in the pursuit of new forms of cultural diplomacy. Moreover, the agency exercised by figures like Fulda in this instance would be a key feature of the future German PEN.

The 1925 and 1926 International PEN Congresses in Paris and Berlin were important milestones for the German group's integration into the international organisation and the committee's

⁷⁶ Peter de Mendelssohn, *S. Fischer und sein Verlag* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1970), 819; Hurter et al., *Biographisches Handbuch*, Vol. 4, 4–5.

⁷⁷ Peter Grupp, 'Harry Graf Kessler als Diplomat', *Vierteljahreshefte fur Zeitgeschichte*, 40, 1 (1992), 61–78.

⁷⁸ Fischer, 'Zentrum', 77.

⁷⁹ Georg Engel, Ludwig Fulda and Hans Brennert to AA, 3 Feb. 1924 with 'Erluterungen und Denkschrift von Hans Brennert', PA AA, R65104.

⁸⁰ Ernst Bischoff, 'Aufzeichnung' 25 Feb. 1924, PA AA R65104. The passage referring to PEN is highlighted by hand in green-coloured pencil on p. 2 of the memorandum.

⁸¹ Engel, Fulda and Brennert to AA, 3 Feb. 1924 with 'Erluterungen und Denkschrift von Hans Brennert' (as note 79).

⁸² *Ibid.*

interactions with state officials. The symbolic importance and continued sensitivity of sending delegates to the French capital prompted careful deliberation about whether to accept their French colleagues' assurances of a comradely welcome. At an extraordinary meeting in March 1925, all but three members voted in favour of taking part in the Paris Congress.⁸³ Around the same time, Friedrich Heilbron, head of the Foreign Ministry's cultural department, sought advice from Ambassador von Hoesch as to whether German participation was 'advisable'; Hoesch, in turn, took advice from Harry Kessler and subsequently expressed no objections.⁸⁴ Thus, a delegation of six German members attended the Congress, led by Federn and Blunck, whose travel costs were covered by the Foreign Ministry's press department.⁸⁵ Heinrich Mann's status as honorary guest meant he was loosely attached to the German contingent but also maintained a more independent stance. The responses of these three Germans to the event illustrate the co-existence of differing concepts of literary internationalism. Whereas Mann saw the Paris Congress as a sign of sympathy for Germany and a triumph of intellectual relations, Federn celebrated Germany's inclusion as the completion of PEN's circle and a step towards a new European cultural community.⁸⁶ Blunck, meanwhile, viewed the event as a major diplomatic victory and the first time that German representatives had not lost face or dignity at an international conference since Versailles.⁸⁷ According to Blunck, this had also been Ambassador Hoesch's message to the German delegation when he received them at the embassy after the Congress. In his later report Hoesch certainly praised specific achievements, particularly the equal treatment of the German participants and officially accepted use of the German language, but his overall conclusion was more measured than Blunck's: 'although I do not want to overestimate the general importance of the event, I do believe that its consequences will have considerable influence on the intellectual relations between our literary world and other countries'.⁸⁸

The Paris Congress consolidated a proposal from the previous year that a Supreme International Council should be formed, on which the German branch was to have a permanent seat, alongside the English, American and French PEN Clubs, and a further seat to be rotated amongst the smaller centres.⁸⁹ Delegates also voted unanimously in favour of holding the next congress in Berlin. Since this was to be the first international gathering of prominent cultural figures in the German capital since the war, there was a great deal riding on the German committee's role as hosts and organisers. Faced with the difficult task of financing the congress, the committee approached private donors such as the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft, whose director contributed 500 RM, and the banker and philanthropist, Franz von Mendelssohn, who donated 2000 RM.⁹⁰ Their contributions reflected a long-standing interest from the commercial and banking sectors in supporting cultural initiatives which boosted Germany's international reputation and therefore also bolstered economic relations and export opportunities. Assuming they would need a further 10,000 RM, Fulda, Federn and the club's treasurer, Hanns Martin Elster, also contacted the Foreign Ministry's cultural department, which fully endorsed the PEN committee's requests in an internal memorandum presented to State Secretary Schubert and Foreign Minister Stresemann.⁹¹ In the first instance, though, the committee hoped that Berlin's municipal authorities would provide funding in light of the overseas publicity

⁸³ Federn and Albert Osterrieth to German PEN Members, 8 Apr. 1925, HFBN, Cb92.64.1:1,09,07.

⁸⁴ AA (Heilbron) telegram to Leopold von Hoesch (German Embassy Paris), 31 Mar. 1925 and Hoesch telegram to AA, 9 Apr. 1925, PA AA Botschaft Paris 919a.

⁸⁵ Federn, 'Der PEN-Klub in Paris', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 10 June 1925; Pro notitia, 1 Apr. 1926, PA AA R65079.

⁸⁶ For Heinrich Mann's assessment see 'Die Literatur und die deutsch-französische Verständigung' [1927], in Heinrich Mann, *Sieben Jahre. Chronik der Gedanken und Vorgänge* [1929], ed. Paul-Peter Schneider (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1994), 317; for Federn's account, see 'Der PEN-Klub in Paris', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 10 June 1925.

⁸⁷ Blunck, *Tagebuch*, 19 May 1925 [incorrectly dated as 19 Apr. 1925], HFBN and Blunck, *Licht auf den Zügeln. Lebensbericht Bd. 1* (Mannheim: Kessler, 1953), 403.

⁸⁸ Leopold von Hoesch report to AA, 30 May 1925, PA AA Botschaft Paris 919a.

⁸⁹ Doherty, 'Guardian', 141.

⁹⁰ Minutes of the German PEN committee meeting, 16 Nov. 1925, HFBN, Cb.64.1:1,09,18 and Congress accounts attached to Hanns Martin Elster and Federn to AA, 28 May 1926, PA AA R65079.

⁹¹ Memorandum Soehring to Schubert/Stresemann, 30 Jan. 1926, PA AA R65079.

the congress would bring the city. However, five weeks before the congress was due to take place, Fulda was informed that the city assembly had refused the request.⁹² The reasons for this were ambiguous: while Elster suggested that the city 'did not want to set a precedent for funding conferences',⁹³ an internal note written by a Foreign Ministry official claimed the assembly had given a more pointed justification that 'the war had made Germany poor so a city like Berlin could not be as generous to foreigners as Paris or London'.⁹⁴ A reception and city tour were to be offered instead.

Without the requisite funding, the congress was now in serious jeopardy and the threat of cancellation harboured the possibility of 'great humiliation' and a 'psychological, propagandistic backlash' against Germany.⁹⁵ The desperate situation was reflected in the minutes of a German PEN meeting on 20 April, when the committee resolved to send a deputation – comprising Federn, Molo and Scheffauer – to the Foreign Ministry to 'announce the cancellation of the congress due to insufficient means' if funds had not been secured by the following week.⁹⁶ Before it came to this, Foreign Ministry officials persuaded the municipal authorities to reconsider and agree to provide a subsidy of 3000 RM.⁹⁷ In the meantime, the Office of the Reich President also turned down a request for support from the German PEN committee, giving no reason other than a lack of available funds, but encouraged the Foreign Ministry to subsidise the Congress from its own budget.⁹⁸ On 30 April, just over two weeks before the congress, the Foreign Ministry finally approved a subsidy of 7000 RM to cover the remaining estimated costs 'in case no further contributions can be made by other official German bodies'.⁹⁹ Any money not spent was to be returned to the ministry.

Despite general agreement over the cultural and diplomatic significance of the congress, as well as an awareness of the potentially damaging fallout if it were cancelled, there was evidently a reluctance amongst official state representatives to shoulder the financial weight of the congress, at least until the last minute. While this may well have been a question of scarce funds, it was also inseparable from the prickly issue of state involvement in cultural affairs. For its part, the German committee stressed that the congress's finances should be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Its recently appointed secretary, Werner Mahrholz – literary critic and feuilleton editor at the *Vossische Zeitung* – argued that the French PEN had 'devised a white lie' that the Paris Congress had been funded by an American patron: 'we must operate accordingly and nothing about the source of the money can be made public'.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, the German committee also sought to capitalise on the somewhat haphazard support it had received from the Foreign Ministry. For future PEN activities, the cultural department agreed to consider providing funds on a case-by-case basis, a flexible, semi-formal arrangement which continued in the coming years.¹⁰¹

Although it had faced attacks from young radical writers over its perceived conservatism, the overall success of the Berlin Congress meant that the German committee had found its stride within the PEN organisation and as an agent of cultural diplomacy.¹⁰² Its members' confident self-positioning not merely as instruments but as authorities on foreign cultural policy was evident in their motion to submit an official statement to Stresemann based on an article Mahrholz had recently published in the *Vossische Zeitung* entitled 'Auslandspropaganda'.¹⁰³ The crux of this piece was the need to prioritise

⁹² Federn to AA, 11 Apr. 1926, PA AA R65079.

⁹³ Elster (German PEN) to Otto Meissner (Office of the Reich President), 16 Apr. 1926, PA AA R65079.

⁹⁴ Pro notitia, 1 Apr. 1926, PA AA R65079.

⁹⁵ Elster (German PEN) to Otto Meissner (Office of the Reich President), 16 Apr. 1926, PA AA R65079.

⁹⁶ Minutes of German PEN committee meeting, 20 Apr. 1926, HFBN, Cb92.64.1:1.09,34.

⁹⁷ AA to Mayor of Berlin, 19 Apr. 1926 and Magistrat Berlin (Scholtz) to AA, 26 Apr. 1926, PA AA R65079.

⁹⁸ Office of the Reich President to AA (Heilbron), 17 Apr. 1926, PA AA R65079.

⁹⁹ Elster to AA, 23 Apr. 1926 and AA (Schmidt-Rolke) to German PEN (Elster), 30 Apr. 1926, PA AA R65079.

¹⁰⁰ Mahrholz to German PEN committee, 1 May 1926, HFBN, Cb92.64.1:1.09,36.

¹⁰¹ Elster and Federn to AA, 28 June 1926 and AA to Elster, 30 July 1926, PA AA R65079.

¹⁰² For more detail on the Berlin Congress, see Windsor, 'Cultural Conflict', 120–4.

¹⁰³ Minutes of German PEN committee meeting, 27 May 1926, HFBN, Cb92.64.1:1.09,60.

various forms of cultural exchange in order to convey a positive image of a strong and stable Germany that was no longer rocked by ‘convulsions and paroxysms’ as it had been in recent years.¹⁰⁴ Although PEN was not mentioned explicitly – perhaps deliberately – Mahrholz’s general points, as well as two of the many weaknesses he identified, were directly relevant to the PEN cause: firstly, the fall in German book sales abroad, something he attributed partially to the use of the antiquated *fraktur* font; and secondly, German diplomats’ failure, in his eyes, to treat writers, academics and artists as honoured guests when they travelled abroad, which meant that Germany was missing an opportunity that other countries were taking to extol its intellectuals as representatives of the nation. The article’s open call for a redefinition of ‘overseas propaganda’ which placed greater value on cultural matters was further strengthened by the PEN committee’s desire to communicate this message to Stresemann directly. While this was certainly about serving German interests, including the self-interests of cultural figures themselves, it was also about leaving behind outdated models of nationalist propaganda. In many ways, then, Mahrholz’ ideas extended the assertive national internationalism around which Federn, in particular, had built the German PEN in its early days, now adapted under very different – though nonetheless precarious – domestic and international circumstances.

Mahrholz remained an influential figure in the German PEN until he was taken seriously ill in late 1929. While he was secretary, there was a change of guard in the committee and its leadership, which briefly threatened to disrupt the group’s relative stability. After Fulda resigned as chairman in October 1927, Heinrich Mann was elected unanimously to take his place.¹⁰⁵ However, having initially accepted the role, Mann resigned from the German PEN altogether following a dispute with its treasurer, Elster. Explaining his decision to the PEN leadership in London, Mann also complained about the German group’s nationalist and ‘reactionary’ bias, as he saw it.¹⁰⁶ Instead, the avant-garde writer Theodor Däubler was elected as chairman. In the course of this leadership crisis, Federn also resigned and was replaced by the expressionist writer Leonhard Frank, a figure who had been amongst the German PEN’s early critics. Had Mann assumed the reins of the German PEN Club, it would have taken quite a different direction. The fact that his departure coincided with the arrival of other critical writers such as Alfred Döblin, Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Toller still did little to push the German group towards a more radical form of internationalism. Although Toller was elected to the committee in late 1927 and briefly discussed as potential vice-chairman, he did not play an active role until the early 1930s, and even then acted in a largely independent manner.¹⁰⁷

By the late 1920s the German group had reached the pinnacle of its popularity and influence within the International PEN. Whereas the earlier years had been characterised by efforts to assume a leading position alongside the British and French, the German committee now began to emphasise its symbolic role as champion of the so-called ‘small’ nations and autonomous literatures represented in PEN. At the 1929 International PEN Congress in Vienna, Däubler broke the tradition of rotating the chair of the working sessions between English, French and German representatives and passed the German session to the lead Polish delegate, Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski. In doing this, Däubler referred to the ‘privileged’ status of the German language on Austrian soil and the ‘desire to see a representative of a Slavic language take the president’s chair’.¹⁰⁸ Going further still, he declared: ‘we know no states! We only know cultures which find expression in literatures.’ As well as affirming the kinship of the German Reich and Austrian Republic, Däubler’s apparent show of magnanimity also cast the German PEN as a kind of universal protector of all cultures against state power. This questioning of political state boundaries was something the PEN had been deliberating since 1926, particularly in relation to the Belgian PEN and Yiddish writers. However, Däubler’s symbolic concession towards

¹⁰⁴ Werner Mahrholz, ‘Auslandspropaganda’, *Vossische Zeitung*, 28 May 1926.

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of German PEN committee meeting, 27 Oct. 1927, HFBN Cb.92.64.1:1.09,115.

¹⁰⁶ Heinrich Mann to PEN (Ould), 5 Feb. 1928, HRC PEN Recip. Original in English.

¹⁰⁷ Windsor, ‘Dichter’, 301–9.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Bericht über den PEN-Club-Kongress in Wien vom 24.–29. Juni 29’ (Mahrholz), HRC, PEN Misc., PEN: German Centre (Berlin), Accounts of Activities.

the Polish PEN delegates came in the wake of months of political wrangling in the League of Nations over the treatment of cultural minorities in Europe, during which German–Polish relations had been particularly strained over the sizeable German population in Poland which was linked to territorial disputes between the two nations.¹⁰⁹ In effect, Däubler picked up where Stresemann’s ‘minorities diplomacy’ had come to a disappointing climax at a League Council meeting in Madrid just weeks before. Importantly, Däubler’s rejection of state hegemony not only drew implicitly on the language of cultural autonomy in a geo-political sense, but also merged this with PEN’s efforts to position itself as an autonomous cultural organisation outside the political realm.

Since PEN offered an alternative space to the high-stakes realm of international diplomacy, the German committee was able to revel in its emergence as the ‘leader [*Vormacht*] of all minorities and smaller language groups’ while judiciously claiming that the German delegation had been at pains not to stoke the enthusiasm it had encountered from those other groups.¹¹⁰ To be sure, there was nothing ‘inherently sinister or threatening’¹¹¹ about the German PEN’s tactical advocacy of minority rights as a means of bolstering the identities and interests of German cultural minorities in East Central Europe. However, the emphasis on PEN’s transcendence of state borders was linked with wider moves to redistribute votes and reorganise the International PEN along cultural and linguistic lines, rather than according to nation state principles. Thus far, PEN’s voting system had been allocated proportionally and geographically, with two votes each for the larger nations and one each for the smaller nations. When the English PEN sought official representation for Scotland and the British dominions at the Oslo and Vienna Congresses in 1928 and 1929, however, the German and Polish delegations took exception and were ultimately able to pass a resolution which determined that ‘the right to representation and votes at the Congresses is based solely on the cultural and linguistic autonomy of a literature’.¹¹² In the course of this restructuring, the German group secured two extra votes for sub-groups based in Hamburg and Freiburg, on the basis that they represented the autonomous literatures of the ‘*niederdeutsch*’ and ‘*alemannisch*’ languages. In addition to challenging British imperial predominance in the International PEN, the so-called ‘culture group principle’ (*Kulturgruppenprinzip*) was seen as an opportunity to bolster German influence in the organisation by coordinating votes and strengthening ties amongst German-speakers across Europe, including Austrians, German minorities in Eastern Europe and possibly even Swiss Germans.¹¹³ Taken to its logical conclusion, this would establish a kind of cultural ‘Greater Germany’ within the PEN framework and amount to a symbolic revision of the post-Versailles order. Given that revisionism and internationalism often went hand in hand in 1920s Germany, the German PEN committee found some consensus around these ideas, at least temporarily. That said, members like Blunck, who took these ideas furthest, also point to the fact that PEN’s deliberately broad literary internationalism and its original quest to use cultural authority for political influence left ample scope for its ideals and structures to be stretched and harnessed to accommodate – and partially legitimise – cultural pan-Germanism, alongside more moderate forms of national internationalism. While it would be too simplistic to reduce such ideas and tactics in the Weimar years to a form of proto-Nazi propaganda, men like Blunck would later become complicit in a more

¹⁰⁹ See Carole Fink, ‘Defender of Minorities: Germany in the League of Nations, 1926–1933’, *Central European History*, 5, 4 (1972), 330–57.

¹¹⁰ ‘Bericht über den PEN-Club-Kongress in Wien vom 24.–29. Juni 29’ (as note 108).

¹¹¹ David J. Smith, Marina Germane and Martyn Housden, ‘“Forgotten European”: Transnational Minority Activism in the Age of European Integration’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 25, 2 (2019), 537.

¹¹² ‘Bericht über den PEN-Club-Kongress in Wien vom 24.–29. Juni 29’ (as note 108). On the wider discussions about the structure and organisation of the International PEN and its implications in other national contexts, see Doherty, ‘Guardian’ and Verbruggen, ‘Internationalisme’.

¹¹³ Blunck to Walther von Hollander, 29 Oct. 1930, Cb92.64.1:1,10,150. On the Austrian and Swiss PEN Clubs see Klaus Amann, ‘Der österreichische PEN-Club in den Jahren 1923–1955’, in Dorothee Bores and Sven Hanuschek, eds., *Handbuch PEN: Geschichte und Gegenwart der deutschsprachigen Zentren* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenburg, 2014), 481–532 and Helen Münch-Küng, ‘Der PEN-Club in der Deutschschweiz’ in idem, 563–84.

aggressive pan-Germanic Europeanism, which took the concepts of internationalism and cultural diplomacy to new fascist extremes.¹¹⁴

Conclusions and Epilogue

Within the German PEN Club's turbulent twentieth century, the Weimar-era PEN is rarely seen as more than a prelude to the various iterations of German PEN after 1933.¹¹⁵ And yet, as this article has shown, the first German PEN Club has a complex history of its own which sheds light on Weimar's intellectual and international affairs more broadly. As one of the first organisations to contribute to international reconciliation in direct response to the cultural battles of the First World War, PEN helped reassert Germany's cultural standing relatively quickly in the war's aftermath and enabled German intellectuals to command renewed international respect and influence amongst European elites, albeit to differing degrees across the period. Its ostensibly non-political character accommodated various expressions of (predominantly) liberal and conservative internationalism, which were in turn amalgamated with diverse national concerns and professional interests. Even if its overall impact should not be overstated, as many contemporaries emphasised, the German PEN was remarkably successful in using the club's international framework to strike a symbolic balance between cultivating Weimar's new national identity and reaffirming Germany's heritage as a cultural and linguistic giant at the centre of Europe. While its members included writers of world stature, the German PEN's organisational business was largely determined by core committee members, who played an active part in PEN's international literary officialdom and cultivated a mutually expedient relationship with the German Foreign Ministry in order to position themselves as semi-formal agents of cultural diplomacy. Although Weimar PEN's leading figures such as Federn, Fulda, Mahrholz and Blunck were well-known intellectuals at the time, their relative obscurity now can be partially attributed to the fact that their acquisition and mobilisation of international cultural capital rested on their roles as facilitators and functionaries, rather than as producers of world-class German literature.

The German committee's attempts to carefully balance and blend nationalist and internationalist impulses faced still greater challenges during the economic and international crises of the early 1930s. While their calendar of events was scaled back due to financial pressures, German delegates continued attending the International PEN Congresses and the committee began discussing and taking a more overt stance on pressing political issues. Although the club became increasingly polarised and attracted both Nazi and communist sympathisers, members of different ideological leanings continued to interact, however uneasily, and some moderate committee members persisted in their idealistic attempts to bridge PEN's increasing ideological gaps.¹¹⁶ It was not until its active *Gleichschaltung* that the German PEN ultimately split;¹¹⁷ while anti-Nazi members formed an independent German PEN in Exile, a so-called Union of National Writers was established in Germany after the Nazi-aligned PEN members simultaneously withdrew and were expelled from the international organisation in late 1933.¹¹⁸ Throughout the 1930s and 1940s literary internationalism took on new forms again and became unavoidably politicised as earlier ideological contests became outright confrontations: whereas PEN became infused with anti-fascist activism and German émigrés' defence of German culture, a rival organisation, the European Writers Union, was formed in 1941 to serve as

¹¹⁴ See Benjamin G. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

¹¹⁵ Three of these post-1933 iterations have been the subject of monograph-length studies: Helmut Peitsch, *"No Politics"? Die Geschichte des deutschen PEN-Zentrums in London, 1933–2002* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2006); Sven Hanuschek, *Geschichte des bundesdeutschen PEN-Zentrums von 1951–1990* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004); Dorothee Bores, *Das ostdeutsche P.E.N.-Zentrum 1951 bis 1998: Ein Werkzeug der Diktatur?* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010).

¹¹⁶ Windsor, 'Dichter', 96–106.

¹¹⁷ See Fischer 'Zentrum', 104–25

¹¹⁸ Jan-Pieter Barbian, *The Politics of Literature in Nazi Germany: Books in the Media Dictatorship* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 19–20.

a framework for the ‘soft power’ of Nazi imperialism.¹¹⁹ However, these later fissures should not distort our understandings of the Weimar-era PEN, which in fact offers a more nuanced picture of compromise and coexistence of a time that is all too often seen through a dominant lens of confrontation and polarisation.

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¹¹⁹ Peitsch, “No Politics?”, 13–180; Benjamin G. Martin, “European Literature” in the Nazi New Order: The Cultural Politics of the European Writers Union, 1941–3’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48, 3 (2013), 486–508.

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