
Playing Secret Agent in Hans Christoph Buch's *The Wartburg Warden. A German Story*

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Amongst the manifold and jarring changes brought about by the unification of the two German nations in 1990, the disclosure of the widespread collaboration of East German citizens with the state's secret police apparatus, the Ministry for State Security (MfS or Stasi), gave occasion to an anguished and contentious reappraisal of life in the GDR. Publicly and privately, individuals, families, social circles, and professional groups became entangled in discourses marked by suspicion, accusation, evasion, recrimination, and denial. For those persons who had been victimized by the state's intimidation and coercion, the German parliament proffered an important symbolic act of reconciliation through its decision to provide access to the notorious files that contained a record of the Stasi's surveillance measures and the data gathered from Unofficial Collaborators, known in German as "IMs" or "Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter." The implementation of the Stasi Documents Law on December 29, 1991, offered an opportunity for recognition of suffering and a measure of hope that the vexing speculation about who had or had not been complicit with the regime's policing arm might eventually be replaced by clarity, if not closure. By the summer of 1995, when the second report of the government agency in charge of archiving and administering the documents, the so-called Gauck Office, went to press, over 2.7 million applications to view files had been lodged. Of these, nearly one million originated from ordinary citizens who wished to gain knowledge of the extent to which the Stasi had shaped their past.

The arena of culture proved to be one of the areas where the Stasi concentrated its resources because it suspected rampant subversive activity in intellectual circles. While some writers and former dissidents were reluctant to view their files for fear of encountering a biography distorted by the hateful regime, virtually all who did spoke of the devastating impact the reading had on them. Some were able to confirm past events as they remembered them, others could not correlate the information with the memory of their personal histories and were forced to undertake a thorough re-evaluation.¹ For most victims of the Stasi, reading these

secret police biographies was a protracted process characterized by hermeneutic complexity, yielding not only “bitter disappointments” but also “ravishing revelations,” as the long-exiled poet/songwriter Wolf Biermann noted (182).² Interpersonal relationships of the past were revealed to be predicated on false assumptions, ranging from unwarranted intimacy to misplaced suspicion, which led one writer to issue a belated apology to his neighbors (Schädlich, *Aktenkundig* 40), but past behavior and thought were rendered problematic in countless other ways. The well-known dissident Bärbel Bohley, for example, came to question her effectiveness as a figure in the opposition once she ascertained that the Stasi had not begun spying on her until 1982 (Schädlich, *Aktenkundig* 45). For the writer Günter de Bruyn, the most disturbing aspect about reading the file was his own “capacity for denial” (45) regarding the intensity of the Stasi’s involvement in his life. This, he feared, severely impaired his ability to remember the past for the purpose of writing his autobiography. The various generic classifications employed by the persons reporting on their experience with the files, such as “quasi-biography,” “crime story,” “caricature,” “faction,” or “novel” speak to the non-documentary, hybrid quality of the documents. Klaus Schlesinger, for example, reported that he felt as if he were reading a novel with himself as the protagonist (123). In many cases, the attentive readers found it impossible to recognize themselves in their unauthorized textual identities. Although the opening of the files was intended as a revelatory act yielding “truth,” the writings assembled in the files appeared to their readers as enigmatic, polyvalent, and highly contingent texts comprised of various layers of fictionalization, encoded by multiple authors and, in many cases, modified by several editors. The resultant sensibility constitutes part of what Wolfgang Emmerich has called the “furor melancholicus” of post-unification, “Eastern” literature with its dual focus on disillusionment over the failure of the socialist promise and on the hardships of reconstructing biography (460-461).

On the side of the perpetrators, the situation was no less complicated. Many of the Stasi’s informers were unsure of the exact contents of their files, particularly regarding the information authored by their handlers. They were also subject to certain restrictions in accessing their files so as not to be able to refresh the often intimate, personal knowledge they had gained of others. The precarious situation of the collaborators, namely the question of how much to admit before a concrete accusation was made, became evident in the manner in which Manfred Stolpe publicized his Stasi contacts. Stolpe, who had held several principal positions in the Protestant Church of the federal state of Brandenburg, became a member of the Social Democratic Party in the summer of 1990 and was nominated to be the party’s leading candidate. In November of the same year, he was elected to the

office of Minister President of Brandenburg. In order to pre-empt the revelations about to be aired on the television news program *Report*, he initiated the debate surrounding his work with the Stasi by admitting in early 1992 to having had extensive communications with representatives of the MfS under the codename "Sekretär." He endeavored to frame his work for the Stasi as an attempt to realize political reforms from within the system and drew a comparison between the roles played by the Protestant Church in the GDR and by the Confessing Church in the Third Reich ("Man bekam" 23). The details of Stolpe's involvement, that he had met with Stasi officers in "safe houses" or that he had received the infamous Medal of Honor in 1978, emerged only gradually during investigations by the committee in charge of researching the prominent case. Stolpe continued to respond only to those aspects of his past for which evidence was about to be produced. Shortly before the Stolpe Committee's final report was released, he claimed to regret his prior negligence in coming forward. This common strategy of confessing in installments allowed him to hold onto his political office. In fact, Stolpe was elected for two more terms in Brandenburg, in 1994 and 1998, and even received an appointment in the cabinet of the Schröder administration's second term in 2002. As far back as the early 1990s, notable political figures such as Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt, Johannes Rau, and Wolfgang Thierse had expressed solidarity for Stolpe's plight. What is more, his name repeatedly came up during the 1990s in connection with the search for candidates for the office of Federal President (see Reuth 18ff). Thought by many to be the quintessential turncoat and political animal, it is perhaps not surprising that such a problematic and charismatic figure as Stolpe should have become the subject of literature. In his comprehensive study of unification in German literature, Frank Thomas Grub finds that Stolpe was indeed the model for a number of satirical narratives addressing the themes of guilt, collusion, and accountability in the early 1990s (532), as for example Wiglaf Droste's *Madonna of Brandenburg* or Günter Herlt's *The Stasi File 'Jesus.'*

A divisive figure like Stolpe and his public statements demonstrated that the struggle to control the information contained in the Stasi files and to rewrite the GDR past was linked to the narrative form in which the files appeared. In her analysis of the situation of former East German writers, Alison Lewis outlines the changing conditions affecting the dissemination of the files in the early 1990s. When the files began to circulate as literary objects, part of a new, post-unification field of cultural production, they also became embedded in a number of literary genres accordant with a late-capitalist economy of symbolic exchange (382-383). Through inscription in biography, autobiography, documentary, commentary, reportage, satirical essay, or a range of other, hybrid genres, the

files were re-appropriated and resituated. Within these generic frameworks, the victims of the Stasi attempted to recover their “stolen” biographies and to draw a superior “truth” out of the files, securing ethical status and cultural capital in the process. But, as Lewis notes, “just at that moment when the file is able to tell all, to spill its truth and shed its secrecy, it must do so via the literary artefact, itself a cluster of genres in which the boundaries between truth and fiction, honesty and duplicity are frequently blurred” (394).³ In this regard, the informer’s autobiography became a particularly contentious genre, as evidenced first in the quarrel triggered by the publication of Christa Wolf’s *What remains* (1990), an autobiographical fiction about her supervision by the Stasi. Written in the late 1970s but not published until after unification, *What remains* initiated a heated debate about the complicity of intellectuals while Wolf herself, one of the GDR’s best-known and privileged authors, was attacked for being a “state poet.” Such debates occurred again with subsequent releases such as Heiner Müller’s *War without Battle* (1992), which was widely denounced as a cynical exercise in self-exculpation and obfuscation precisely because Müller glossed over his involvement with the Stasi.⁴ Having already divulged certain aspects of his Stasi past in January 1992, Manfred Stolpe wrote more extensively on the matter later in the same year in the autobiographical *Difficult Beginnings*. Portraying himself as a victim of slander and innuendo throughout, Stolpe bemoaned the prevailing “black-and-white portrayal” and voiced a desire for a more differentiated discourse (*Schwieriger Aufbruch* 10).

While many West German authors participated in the so-called Christa-Wolf-Debate, which fascinated not only the *Feuilleton* readers but also a larger public at the time, and the subsequent discussions about how to come to terms with the GDR past, few went so far as to address the role of the Stasi in their literary work during the early 1990s. Indeed, Hans Christoph Buch’s fictional autobiography of a picaresque informer modeled on the figure of Stolpe, *The Wartburg Warden. A German Story* (1994), stands as the lone significant work of fiction about the Stasi before the publication of Günter Grass’ much-debated *Too Far Afield* in the following year. Personal experiences and relationships with East German intellectuals may have led both of these authors to turn their attention to the Stasi theme. Both Grass and Buch lived in West Berlin in the 1970s and ‘80s where they witnessed at close range the pernicious effects of the GDR system and the Stasi’s policing on East German writers.⁵ After 1989, Buch stood squarely on the side of those demanding full disclosure of the files and a thorough reckoning with the past. In several disputatious interventions in the leftist Berlin daily *Die Tageszeitung* and in the literary journal *neue deutsche literatur*, Buch took former

collaborators among writers to task and expounded on the collusion between literature and power. In an essay titled “Brecht and No End in Sight” (1990), he described the inseparability of literary status and political naïveté, or worse opportunism, bemoaning this perceived failure of progressive intellectuals to resist oppressive regimes as an age-old German tradition:

Beide Stätten, Brechts ehemaliges Wohnhaus in der Chausseestraße und die von einem Bürgerkomitee bewachte Stasi-Zentrale in der Normannenstraße, gehören für mich untrennbar zusammen: so wie das Goethehaus in Weimar und das KZ Buchenwald.

[Both sites, Brecht’s former residence on Chaussee Street and the Stasi headquarters on Normannen Street, which is being guarded by a citizen’s committee, are inseparable for me: just like the Goethe House in Weimar and the Buchenwald Concentration Camp.] (“Brecht” 38)⁶

In the context of a “retrospective dissection of historical abominations,” which Paul Michael Lützeler has identified as a defining characteristic of German literature of the early 1990s (106), *The Wartburg Warden* takes up a conception of the deleterious and longstanding role played by the secret police deriving from its dedicatee Hans Joachim Schädlich, an author who had been bullied by the Stasi in the early days of his career and had emigrated to the FRG in 1977.

Buch’s fantastic novel is inscribed in a rich tradition of German picaresques employing several of the major elements that have been identified as typical of the picaresque genre such as first-person point of view, confessional mode, episodic structure, a naïve antihero of unknown background, and a satiric aim. The so-called “Schelmenromane” have generally emerged in places faced with national and/or social crises. In the wake of World War II, for example, the genre was revived in Germany with novels such as Thomas Mann’s *Confessions of Felix Krull, confidence man* (1954), Günter Grass’ *Tin Drum* (1959), and Heinrich Böll’s *Clown* (1963). Not only do these novels give expression to the picaro’s fundamental alienation, but they also attempt to come to terms with historical dislocation and the loss of cultural tradition. In similar fashion, *The Wartburg Warden* addresses events tied to important periods of national upheaval, disintegration, and division in three distinct parts related to the protagonist’s turbulent interactions with three extraordinary figures: “The Devil’s Arse” retells the life of Martin Luther and “Die and Learn to Live” the life of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, while “The Trial of Lucullus” covers the last years in the life of Bertolt Brecht and the history of the GDR up to the year 1990. While *The Wartburg Warden* can be read as an irreverent variation on its picaresque predecessors and, by implication, as a project in intergeneric dialogue, I would like to focus here on the ludic character

of the text, following Gordana Yovanovich's recent study of the modern picaresque genre as consisting of fundamentally playful texts revolving around the illusion of presence of an (auto)biographical subject. I refer to Yovanovich's conception of picaresque characters as players and playing authors in a more general context of the scholarship on the ludic, notably Warren Motte's study of "playtexts" as vehicles for the establishment of a ludic community requiring of the reader various acts of decoding. In *The Wartburg Warden*, the deployment of a postmodernist poetics marked by play, plurality, allusion, and openness serves to transport a tangled web of discourses on crime, secrecy, memory, and history that will, in the end, draw the reader to an understanding of contemporary Germany based on its own mode of representation.

The narrator's opening pronouncement in the novel's prologue contains *in nuce* much of the polyphonic and citational structure of the entire text, as well as a first playful engagement with the reader: "Ich bin der Burgwart der Wartburg, mein Name ist Hase, und ich weiß von nichts" ["I am the Wartburg Warden, my name is Hare and I know nothing"]. This establishes the motifs of secrecy, inversion, indeterminacy, and recurrence for the ensuing narrative. While the syllabic switch in the names allows for a diffusion of the narrative self, the reference to a well-known winged word, the first among many, suggests that the narrator's recollections will be governed by both ignorance and a refusal of full disclosure, locating the narrative in the area of juridical tactics. After proclaiming the naïveté typical of the loquacious picaro in the superlative, and thus seemingly negating the autobiographical project from the outset, the narrator goes on to relate that he has been unmasked as a collaborator with the East German secret service by a writer. By way of punishment, he was removed from the positions he held with the Goethe Society in Weimar and at the National Memorial Foundation and transferred to the Wartburg Castle to act as caretaker. Fittingly, it was at this highly symbolic site that his career had begun 500 years earlier, although previous assignments at the battle of the Teutoburg Forest, at King Arthur's Round Table, and as the torturer of Joan of Arc at Reims are also mentioned in passing, apparently stretching his life back in history indefinitely: "I am immortal, much like the institution that employs me" (9). This section concludes with an editorial note announcing the use of aliases to preclude "resemblances to actually existing persons" (13). Thus, the narrator hints at the existence of an author/editor beyond the textual world who may or may not be identical with the real, potentially libelous author. In *The Wartburg Warden*, the use of such disclaimers, as well as subordinate additions like the prologue and the postscript that constitute the novel's frame, functions as a metatextual marker, highlighting the constructedness of the text.

The novel's immortal autobiographical subject remains polymorphous and enigmatic throughout, a precocious shape shifter in German (cultural) history whose identity is predicated on an unending series of deceptions and simulations. The picaresque appears in manifold shapes, ranging from devil, vampire, female, revenant, and gargoyle to various animals and objects, historical figures, and several literary figures as well as the real-life models for those fictional characters. In addition, the narrator depicts himself as an incongruous character combining awesome supernatural abilities with a kind of elemental incompetence, sudden lapses of memory with omniscience, and instances of pathetic weakness with displays of super-heroic strength. At times, he operates at the center of pivotal historical events while also slipping into the blind spots of officially recorded history, formulating an apocryphal history that purports to supplement the official record by restoring what has been lost or suppressed. He offers new details about the lives of his assigned targets, "beyond what the biographers have done" (72), often reporting flippantly on their human weaknesses, bringing to light their scatological and sexual exploits, but also revising their position in contemporaneous politics. In the first book, the narrator finds himself assigned to Thuringia to combat the scourge of heresy. While validating events known to be inaccurate such as the myth of the ink stain on the wall of Luther's study (42), the playfully maladroit narrator takes credit for striking Luther with lightning and supplying the obstinate monk with hammer and nails for the posting of his theses against the papacy: "Die Kirche hat sich von diesem Anschlag nie erholt. Frag mich nicht, lieber Leser, worum es dabei ging; mein theologisches Wissen ist noch bruchstückhafter als meine Lateinkenntnisse" ["The church never recovered from these strikes of the hammer. Don't ask me, dear reader, what it was about; my theological knowledge is even more fragmentary than my Latin skills"] (33). Although he appears as an agent of change, Luther's shadow also portrays himself as a pawn in a vast conspiratorial game, suggesting that a secret history exists behind the known historical record:

Die Theologen streiten bis heute darüber, ob ich ein gleichberechtigter Gegenspieler Gottes bin, der bei der Auslösung zur Schwachweltmeisterschaft die schwarzen Figuren gezogen hat, oder ob ich mit beschränkter Haftung, im Auftrag höherer Mächte handle, als Teil von jener Kraft, die stets das Böse will und doch das Gute schafft.

[Theologians are debating to this day whether I am a worthy opponent of God and simply happened to draw the color black in the world chess championships, or whether I am, with limited liability, an agent of an even higher power, acting on behalf of a force that always wants to do evil deeds but somehow ends up doing good.] (43)

He oscillates between the roles of the fool who tells unwelcome truths and of the anonymous fellow-traveler who can deny responsibility when it suits him, hiding behind the nondescript “we.” He tends to turn his failures, as for example a botched assassination attempt on Luther, into comical lapses and dialectically vindicated deceptions that only his employers had the wherewithal to foresee. Thus, his handlers at the Holy Inquisition are content with the result: “Um Schlimmeres zu verhüten, müssen wir das Schlimmste tun. So besehen war meine Arbeit ein Erfolg. Nicht Bruder Martin, *ich* habe die Reformation gemacht” [“In order to prevent worse we have to do the worst. Viewed in this way, my work was a success. Not Brother Martin, *I* set the Reformation in motion”] (43). In the practice of foregrounding the fictionality of extant historical knowledge, the narrative shifts between several paradoxical positions when the agent of an omnipotent, secretive institution is invested in exposing the underside of important historical events while calling into question the prevalence of cause and effect in historical development.

The numerous instances of grafting historical characters onto a fantastic world in *The Wartburg Warden* lay bare the ontological structure of the fictional text, what Brian McHale has described as the “ontological dominant” of postmodernist fiction (10). A particularly resonant example of such transworld migrations through and within textual layers occurs in the second chapter where the narrator has entered Goethe’s world undercover, as one Carl Wilhelm Jerusalem, who was the real-life figure upon whom Werther was in part based. In turn, Jerusalem overhears the famed exclamation of a fictional character from the *Sorrows of Young Werther*, Lotte’s congenial “Klopstock.” The historical fantasy represents a flagrant violation of the realistic norms of historical fiction, calling into question the reliability of official history, and may compete with archival records or encyclopedic knowledge as a vehicle of historical truth. When such migrations between the real and the fictional occur, an ontological boundary has been transgressed. As can be said of postmodernist fictions in general, *The Wartburg Warden* foregrounds this seam by making the transition from one realm to another as abundant and as conspicuous as possible. There remains, however, one constant within the historiographic games played out in this topsy-turvy textual world: all three of the sacrosanct figures of German history fail to equal the revolutionary impetus of their writings in the arena of politics, as evidenced by Luther’s opposition to the peasant revolt: “Meine Arbeit trug endlich Früchte. Das schwarze Schaf der Familie, der Sündenbock des Papstes entpuppte sich als frommes Lamm; der Welterschütterer war zur Stütze von Staat und Gesellschaft, Kaiser und Reich avanciert” [“My work finally bore fruit. The black sheep in the family, the pope’s scapegoat, revealed himself to be a gentle lamb; the revolutionary had become a pillar of society and a supporter of

state, Kaiser, and Reich”] (46). The agent’s work again produces results at the time of the French Revolution when Goethe retreats into the literary realm: “Anstatt in das revolutionäre Geschrei und den patriotischen Jubel einzustimmen, hielt er sich streng ans klassische Maß und schmiedete Verse” [“Instead of joining in the revolutionary clamor and the patriotic euphoria, he adhered strictly to classical meter and versified”] (91). In the third chapter, “The Trial of Lucullus,” this leitmotif returns in a recounting of Brecht’s ambivalent stance toward the workers’ uprising of June 1953, a situation manipulated by the agent’s control over the means of transmission: “So sorgte ich dafür, daß der kritische Kommentar des Dichters zu den Ereignissen des 17. Juni ein Staatsgeheimnis blieb, während seine Ergebnissadresse an Walter Ulbricht vom gleichen Tag in allen Zeitungen zitiert wurde” [“I took care that the poet’s critical comments about the events of June 17 remained a state secret while his sycophantic vote of confidence for Walter Ulbricht was quoted in every newspaper”] (132).

In its playful exposé of the secrets in the biographies of Luther, Goethe, and Brecht, which are nonetheless to be suspected of various inaccuracies, the novel draws further attention to issues of agency, authority, and knowledge. Other aspects of the text’s composition support the confounding effect of its language games. Foremost, its citational engagements with a multitude of intertexts serve to instantiate a practice of mischievous appropriation on a number of levels based upon a contradictory tactic of turning to the archive and contesting its authority at the same time. While the canon and the lore that adhere to Luther, Goethe, and Brecht provide fertile grounds for intertextual play, the novel also integrates the discursive formations articulated around these figures during the Cold War when they were used extensively in the construction of each German nation’s cultural and political identity.⁷ Furthermore, the choice of Luther, Goethe, and Brecht marks a point of multiplied referential dispersion pertaining to the longstanding and evolving discussions about “cultural heritage” in the GDR—the home of many of the pertinent historical sites—as well as to the question of “what remains” or what ought to remain of the GDR in unified Germany. Read in this context, *The Wartburg Warden* offers a kind of tertiary quotation for those readers familiar with, for example, Brecht’s controversial adaptation of the *Urfaust* in 1950 or the coincidence in the 1980s of Brecht’s dethronement and Luther’s rehabilitation.⁸ Quotations from the writings of the three iconic figures abound in Buch’s novel, but the narrator takes great liberties in placing and modulating them in a process of pulling apart the canon. Such a misquotation occurs, for example, with a sample from Goethe’s *Faust*, modified to fit into a time centuries prior to its publication, that is heard from the mouth of Martin Luther only to be followed

by a deafening fart. The heterotopian fictional world of *The Wartburg Warden*, where a number of incommensurable orders collide and texts become entangled, is further accentuated by the narrative's heteroglossic composition. Consisting of proverbs, stock phrases, the picaresque's own poetry, modern-day terms such as "wiretap operation" and "to out," ruminations on secondary, scholarly discourses, advertising slogans, and titles, the text can be viewed as fundamentally parodic. In postmodernist texts, parody serves to reveal the contingency of language and discourse, functioning in what Linda Hutcheon has characterized as a de-doxifying mode: "Through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from continuity and difference" (89).

This polyvalent process of affinity and separation in parody comes to the fore in the *The Wartburg Warden's* relationship to its most thoroughly mined pretext, Hans Joachim Schädlich's *Tallhover* (1986), which comes into play in "The Trial of Lucullus." In *Tallhover*, Schädlich created the eponymous, immortal secret service agent, the fantastic embodiment of the principle of unconditional loyalty and service to the state. Deriving from an intense aversion to authoritarian rule, the author's stated purpose was to examine the nature of the secret police and to uncover its disastrous role in German history in an effort to highlight the difference between a democracy and a police state. Early on, a description of the protagonist's juvenile addiction to puzzles doubles as the ironically tempered cipher for the author's narrative procedure: "Zu sehen, wie Stück für Stück der Teil eines grossen Bildes zusammentritt ... wie die Teile des Bildes, der erste Teil und der zweite, der zweite und dritte unverhinderbar zusammenrücken zu übersehbarem Zusammenhang der Tat-Sachen. Die aber verborgen bleiben, wenn Tallhover sie nicht ans Licht bringt mit Kraft und Lust" ["To see how the whole picture comes together, piece by piece ... how the parts of the picture, the first part and the second, the second and the third move together irrevocably to form a coherent and ordered overview of the facts. Though the facts remain obscure, if Tallhover does not bring them to light with verve and enthusiasm"] (14). Tallhover, an ambitious sociopath, enlists in the Prussian secret police in 1842 and soon distinguishes himself in the covert fight against oppositional groups. From this point forward, Tallhover works tirelessly for a series of repressive governments and against alleged enemies of the state such as the Social Democratic Party in the time of Bismarck's rule, the Spartacists at the end of World War I, and an array of subversives during the Third Reich. He rises to the top of the respective bureaucracies because of his unmatched efficiency and his pioneering efforts in the areas of surveillance, data collection, and counterintelligence. Because Tallhover acts as the entity that controls all discourse,

his complicity in criminal activity is never revealed in the text, but it can be inferred that he is behind the executions of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in 1919 and a group of Soviet prisoners of war in 1942. But in June 1953, Tallhover's work comes under attack for the first time in the GDR. His analysis of the causes of the workers' uprising displeases his government, which eventually discharges him for not recognizing "where the enemy stands" (225). At the novel's grotesque ending, Tallhover stages his own show trial arguing that he has failed "serving the idea of the pure police state," his crime being a "crime against History" (272-273). Schädlich's interest in the individual's relationship to historical events is reflected in the manner in which he composed his text as a blend of various documentary materials and fictional forms. The utopian and monstrous rationality unfolded through Tallhover's absolute narrative agency shapes the strictly chronological narrative and leads to a conclusion in his self-abnegation, pulling the reader with him into the trap of German history. At the same time, the ending suggests that the prototypical police spy and the panoptic principle may endure.

In *The Wartburg Warden*, Buch endeavors a highly complex and pervasive intertextual engagement with Schädlich's text, first by recounting the life work of the agent now codenamed "Tallhover" up until the end of *Tallhover*, then by elaborating on the pretext up until the present of its own narration. Tallhover survives his suicide attempt through the intervention of a Russian Colonel Nikotin, made explicit as the droll copy of a Brechtian *deus ex machina*. His first major assignment is the observation of Brecht whose lascivious lifestyle and individualistic tendencies make him suspicious in the eyes of the authorities. For that purpose, Tallhover is made to undergo a sex-change operation. He then introduces himself to Brecht as an attractive young Communist named Christa T., wearing "Je reviens," a French perfume, and a belt buckle inscribed with the phrase "Always willing."⁹ Brecht is shown both as an important artist and as a despicable character who maltreats everyone in his home and in the theater, including the Stasi agents placed around him. The crafty picara, however, manages to keep him in Moscow's favor. After he receives the Stalin Peace Prize, Tallhover's mission is complete, and he is returned to his original gender and enrolled in divinity school. Now operating under the codename "Sekretär" Tallhover assumes responsibility for the peaceful coexistence of church and state. Here, the text refers to the Stasi files for the first time, using the name intended to conceal Stolpe's identity to "out" the collaborator. Both Stolpe's Stasi-sanctioned work and his official rewards are outlined with slight modifications but clearly recognizable for readers even remotely familiar with the "Stolpe case." During the 1980s, "Sekretär" grows disillusioned as a result of the apparent futility of his efforts but is once again

saved by Nikotin who reassures him: “Competent people like you are always and everywhere needed” (142). “Sekretär” marches at the front of the demonstrations leading to the collapse of the GDR regime, deeming it “best to neutralize the movement by leading it” (143). In light of the investigation of his connection to the Stasi, in the narrator’s estimation a “smear campaign,” he grudgingly inserts a disclaimer (144). The retracting statement contradicts in several points the historical record, in addition to underscoring the fictionality of the narrative the agent has told up to this point:

Unrichtig ist *drittens* die im vorliegenden Buch aufgestellte Behauptung, ich hätte Dr. Martin Luther, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe und Bertolt Brecht nachrichtendienstlich observiert, was schon aus Gründen der Chronologie unmöglich ist; ich kenne die genannten Personen nicht ... und höre ihre Namen zum ersten Mal.... Ich habe weder Bockshufe noch Pferdefüße, und auch keine Hörner auf der Stirn. Ich trage Nadelstreifenanzüge, bügelfreie Hemden und dezent gemusterte Krawatten.... Ich bin ein mustergültiger Ministerpräsident.

[The claim made in this book that I was involved in the surveillance of Dr. Martin Luther, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Bertolt Brecht is patently false; it is not possible for reasons of chronology; I do not know the persons named above ... in fact, I am hearing their names for the first time.... I have neither hooves nor horns on my forehead. I wear pinstriped suits, wrinkle-resistant shirts, and tastefully patterned neckties.... I am an exemplary Minister President.] (145-146)

At the conclusion of the novel stands a postscript recounting a “memorable encounter” (147). Having rushed to the site of an attack against foreigners living in Germany, the narrator is confronted by a young nationalist:

In diesem Augenblick hatte ich ein Gefühl des *Déjà-vu*. Der junge Mann mit der schmalen Lederkrawatte, in der eine Hakenkreuznadel steckte, war mehr als nur ein Doppelgänger, ein verlorener Schatten oder eine jugendliche Replik meiner selbst: *Ich* war es, der mir, von Scheinwerfern angestrahlt, in dem überfüllten Saal gegenüberstand. Ich wandte den Kopf und verbarg mein Gesicht vor den Fernsehkameras. Mein *alter ego* hob den Arm zum Hitlergruß, während ich auf einer Woge von Beifall zum Ausgang meiner Geschichte schwamm.

[At this instant, I had a feeling of *déjà-vu*. The young man wearing a sleek leather necktie, on which a swastika pin was fastened, was more than just a Doppelgänger, a lost shadow, or a youthful replica of me: it was I who stood across from me in the floodlit, crowded hall. I turned my head and hid my face from the television cameras. My *alter ego* raised his arm to do the Hitler salute while I drifted to the exit and to the end of my story on a wave of rapturous applause.] (149)

As the narrator exits from his/story and toward an uncertain future in the stream of discourse, the text performs a number of paradoxical maneuvers by completing a movement both circular and linear through the device of the open frame. For the reader, the picaresque's extratextual identity becomes clearer as the narrative's time line funnels toward the present. At the moment of the near-definitive evocation of a contemporaneous political figure identity is once again diffused through the narrator's uncanny encounter with himself and his cowardly attempt to escape public exposure.

In Hans Christoph Buch's picaresque novel, the shape-shifting picaresque/a acts at the behest of various powerful institutions, not as a rogue in the popular sense who brings to light hypocrisy in the ruling order. The fictional universe the narrator creates unveils a long and fantastic history of crimes in the service of authoritarianism. The narrator is forever putting on new masks, undermining the cohesion of figures in maneuvers of deception, slipping into new textual planes, and fostering the illusion of presence afforded by the genre of autobiography. He travels across the boundaries of textual worlds, revealing himself to be an unpredictable nuisance in German cultural history and memory while remaining throughout an entity made of language and confined to discourse. Buch's carnivalized, antifoundational narrative deploys various devices, motifs, and allusive practices commonly found in postmodernist fiction such as the pervasive problematization of narrative stance, the playful modulation of subjectivities, and the creation of a heterotopian space where fragments of a number of inchoate orders have been gathered, claiming a transworld identity between characters in the projected, fictional worlds and real-world historical figures. The novel discloses the provisionality of knowledge while engaging the reader in a game of hide-and-seek across its various boundary violations. In addition, it foregrounds intertextuality as a central principle of construction, staging the interplay of repetition and difference. Part of the text's manifold contacts with its pretexts, which include recycling, reformulation, recombination, and reinvention, is constituted by a parodic dimension. As has been shown, *The Wartburg Warden* inscribes both an enlargement of the secret agent's ungainly features to comic effect and a fragmentation of the unitary Tallhover figure of Schädlich's novel into a fantastic plurality.

This metatextual dimension of *The Wartburg Warden*, which integrates the playful re-embodiment of Tallhover and his imprint into a reflection on textual identity and on the relation of present culture to the past, paradoxically does not represent a misprision of Schädlich's text but rather an affirmation of its underlying concerns, albeit through entirely different means. With the narrator's sudden self-recognition at the end and his inglorious departure, the text maps out an exit

strategy from its own coordinates through which the reader may concretize a space beyond the narrative, a world where the language games end. In a period of national self-inspection and reorganization, Buch's text can thus be read to partake in a widespread reappraisal of the status of historical consciousness and representation in the early 1990s. Confronted with the conditions of the post-Cold-War order marked by the revelations about the Stasi and a resurgence of right-wing violence in unified Germany, numerous commentators on the state of the nation endeavored to position the so-called "return of history" and postmodernist culture as incompatible polarities. In a much-quoted volume provocatively titled *Waiting for the Führer* (1993), Bodo Morshäuser, for example, equated those vanguard Prenzlauer Berg authors who collaborated with the Stasi with many West Germans who were guilty of a kind of postmodernist "denial of meaning" during the 1980s, the "decade of players," leading to the ascendance of right-wing thought (and action) into the societal mainstream after unification (76ff). Broader in scope, O. K. Werckmeister's term "citadel culture" encapsulates a valuation of the "West" in the 1970s and 1980s as a diffuse, decisionless, politically inconsequential culture of aesthetic self-gratification that denied the exploitative conditions underlying its own prosperity and success (see also Habermas 145). As regards literature, critics of postmodernist writing tended to point to a perceived lack of seriousness rooted in its celebration of ambiguity and enthronement of irony and called for a reinstatement of realist modes of analysis and representation, a position that was frequently tied to a professed desire for a panoramic, all-encompassing historical novel about unification, a so-called "Wenderoman."¹⁰ In his postmodernist spy novel, Hans Christoph Buch stakes out a contrary position by employing history as a playground for literature, illuminating, obfuscating and revising the record in a convoluted spy game that challenges the reader to locate the real in the textual strata of the projected world. As Buch has asserted, the postmodernist writer carves out a stance as politically engaged historicist not through the arbitrary combination of fragments from the past but rather through the calculated use of historical discourses as parodic citation.¹¹ ✱

Notes

¹ For more on the role of the Stasi files since unification, see the contributions by Miller, Wagner, and Lewis.

² Biermann employs a pun on the German term for deception speaking of "bittere Enttäuschungen" and "hinreißende Ent-Täuschungen."

³ On the subject of autobiography, see Preece, Woods.

⁴ See for example the essays by Pickerodt, Gemünden, and Gleber.

⁵ On Buch's participation in personal and literary exchange during the Cold War, see his "Was bleibt?" and Berbig 226ff.

⁶ My translation. Longer quotes will be shown in their original form henceforth.

⁷ See for example several contributions in the volume edited by François and Schulze.

⁸ See for example Dahlke, Langermann, and Taterka; Roy; Dähn and Heise; Bathrick; Vietor-Engländer.

⁹ This passage represents a play on two well-known works by Christa Wolf, the novel *The Quest for Christa T.* (1968), featuring the remembrance of the life of an ordinary, unheroic woman in the stifling environment of GDR socialism, and the short story "Self-Experiment" (1973) in which the protagonist's sex change is the central plot device.

¹⁰ For a cogent discussion of the German debates about postmodernism, see Grimm and the collections edited by Harbers and by Ziegler.

¹¹ See also Buch's own defense of the historical accuracy and acuity of a postmodernist poetics in "Haben die deutschen Schriftsteller die Geschichte verlernt?" On the contentious debates about political engagement and "Gesinnung" in literary production after unification, see Peitsch.

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