

***Tallhover will not die.* On the image of the secret agent as an expression of oppression in the German and the Romanian German literature in the eighties and nineties**

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The present paper tries to explain some German and Romanian-German authors' attempt of interpreting the mechanism that made possible East European communist dictatorships, through creating a complex image of the secret agent. The selected characters are just examples and the selection is by no means exhaustive. The novel characters of Hans Joachim Schädlich, Günter Grass, Herta Müller, Gerd Ungureanu and Wolfgang Hilbig are explored in connection with the events before, during and shortly after the regime change at the end of 1989 and are examined as regards their similarities and differences.

Keywords: *German literature, eighties and nineties, Romanian German Literature, secret agent*

1. FRG², GDR³ and Romanian German literature of the eighties and beginning of the nineties

Besides distinct features, the FRG and GDR literatures show some important similarities after the division of the country and the building of the Berlin wall. The literature of the 1980s represents the answer to the new subjectivity⁴ of the seventies and shows an increased political and social commitment of writers. A

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⁴ "Neue Subjektivität" appeared in the FRG as opposed to the engaged literature of the seventies in the context of the movement of freedom. Preferred themes are private dreams and problems, introspection, personal experiences. It was also well represented in the GDR, as a result of political and social suppression, being critical of society. The tone is mostly of resignation (Beutin 2001, 557).

severe economic recession in the FRG brought about austerity measures, especially with regard to culture. The conflict between policy and culture in the FRG was exacerbated during the conservative government, by the threat to peace represented by the nuclear weapons race, a situation which became obvious in the representation of the foreigner, too. For example, the Goethe-Institute refused to finance Heinrich Böll's and Günter Grass's appearances in cultural events abroad, because they were considered to be of left-wing political orientation. The political and social situation caused a return to the *résistance* power of literature. There is a certain continuity in the works of well-known authors: Alexander Kluge, Herbert Achternbusch, Heinrich Böll, Martin Walser and Peter Handke consistently insist on the effectiveness of literature. Their common program is to work on the readers' perception of the reality through their writing. In his *Aesthetics of Resistance* (1983), Peter Weiss explains that art is the collective memory of humanity (1983). Only a few years later, Grass would change his reasons for writing: he writes the novel *The Rat* (Grass 1999) no longer against the passage of time, but in order to postpone the end of humanity with the help of words (Grass 1999, 108 - 112).

As a result of the different political resistance and opposition movements in Eastern Germany, environmental, anti-war, anti – nuclear energy themes are also recurring in the GDR literature. The protest triggered by the expatriation⁵ of the GDR poet and song writer Wolf Biermann brought about a massive forced exodus of older and younger established authors (Maron, Hilbig, Barsch, Miller, Kolbe) to the FRG, inducing an irreversible loss of substance (Beutin 2001, 557), but also to an open literary society as a result of the fact that authors from both countries were now living together.

At the end of the decade, the literary interest for environmental and nuclear catastrophes begins to fade (although with Chernobyl it had become clear that such catastrophes are also possible not only during war time, but also in periods of peace, in a civilian environment), making place to topics in connection with the 1989 revolution in the GDR and the reunification of Germany, that is, the end of the Cold War. Both Eastern and Western writers explore the revolution and its impact on society. Günter Grass together with the established GDR authors Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym declare themselves against the reunification of Germany, pleading for the preservation of a separate, socialist state, which should become democratic. That is what they express in their works. Writers having moved from the GDR to the FRG

⁵ Wolf Biermann, protest singer, was deprived of his GDR citizenship and forced to leave the country as a result of him performing protest songs in Western Germany.

write about the loss of identity and about living in a modern world without support. Other authors such as Thomas Brussig and Thomas Sparschuh dealt with the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification in a funny, ironic way.

Since the topic of change is very closely linked to overcoming the past, remembering is very often discussed in the 1990s. Many texts deal with fascism and the Holocaust in this decade. (e.g. Martin Walser: *The Spring Fountain* -1949). Walser triggers a violent controversy with his warning against the exploitation of the Holocaust, in which Günter Grass speaks out in his favour.

Günter Grass deals with guilt, naming and confessing of guilt in all his work, no matter whether it is about guilt towards Jews and Poles or towards women, the Third World or the environment with the declared aim to contribute to stopping the repetition of other crimes. Although in *The Gdańsk Trilogy* he attributed the guilt to individuals in particular and let them pay for it, he believes that for such crimes as genocide an entire people is responsible. For this reason he opposes to the reunification of Germany, suggesting that the country should remain divided as a memorial against crimes against humanity, because he does not believe in the zero hour⁶, in the possibility to break completely with the fascist past and a beginning without a previous burden.

The German language authors in Romania of the same period are of double affiliation: to the national social political context and to the German literature created under related social political conditions by authors like, for instance Berthold Brecht, Wolf Dieter Brinkmann, Peter Handke. This is why some researchers speak about its “island nature” (Cotârlea 2008, 31). Another parallel can be drawn to the GDR literature: as a result of massive emigration of German natives for which the FRG government is supposed to have played over a billion Deutschmark (Hüsch 2013), a high percentage of the German population, including most of the writers, emigrated to Western Germany, bringing about the so-called end of the Romanian German literature (Cotârlea 2008, 52), very similarly to the situation of the GDR literature. Many of the emigrated authors, such as Herta Müller, Richard Wagner, William Totok, Horst Samson, Johann Lippet, Helmuth Frauendorfer are now considered as part of the German literature (Beutin 2001, 694), so the idea of the open literary society as a result of the fact that authors from western and eastern Germany were living together can be applied to this case on a smaller scale.

⁶ Stunde Null.

2. Tallhover – Hoftaller

One of the two central figures in *Too far a Field* by Günter Grass (1999), Hoftaller, is the alter ego of Schädlich's Hoftaller, a secret agent during 136 years of German history, about whom Grass had decided, he shouldn't be allowed to die. Grass wrote an essay on this subject entitled "Tallhover darf nicht sterben"⁷ (Grass 2000, 27) where he explains his position towards the figure of the secret agent.

2.1. Tallhover – Schädlich

Hans Joachim Schädlich, who had been forced to leave the GDR in 1977, against whom the Ministry of State Security had previously, in 1976, opened an operative procedure, narrates in his novel the 136-year life of the secret agent Ludwig Tallhover, whom the reader is allowed to accompany through the complex and confusing historical events of the 19th and 20th centuries.

In the foreground there is no political system, but always the blind obedience of Tallhover, who is active in turn for the Prussian King and the German Kaiser, for the Nazi dictatorship and for the German Democratic Republic. He spies on and pursues the opponents of the respective regimes, the first socialists and communists, then anti-fascists and, finally, the enemies of socialism, while remaining true to one duty: to protect the state from its opponents, from insurgents, without coming into any conflict with himself.

The reader doesn't find out about Tallhover's private biography more than a few hints. He grew up with the motto "Ordnung muss sein – there must be order" (Schädlich 2004, 9), he lives with his mother, jigsaw puzzle is his favorite pastime, and not even his mother, whom he pursues when she is sitting on the toilet, knows that his right eye is more perceptive. He is not married and has no friends, his private life is limited to buy and solve puzzles.

The central point of the novel is Lenin's journey to Russia. Tallhover tries to call to account those who allowed Lenin the free way through Germany. For him, it does not matter that Lenin's trip would ultimately bring Germany benefits in World War I as a result of the Russian Revolution. The simple-minded Tallhover sees only the public enemy in Lenin and anyone who supports his revolutionary activities, is considered as reprehensible and criminal.

⁷ Tallhover is not allowed to die.

On June 17, 1953, the day of the Uprising of 1953 in East Germany, Tallhover believes he had failed in the magnitude of his task. Too many suspects had gone unpunished; too many guilty parties could not be arrested. He had failed in his eyes and thus draws the ultimate consequence: he condemned himself to death.

Grass sees Tallhover as the immortal agent who, as a state security expert, had survived all systems because he had been incessantly pursuing his duties. The thing, the case that engages Tallhover according to G. Grass, is actually “a hundred years of German history as a permanent case, as an unfinished, not to be closed file” (Grass 2000, 27). Grass describes the language of the novel as typical for police procedures and the presentation of system changes as fluid transitions in secret files. For him, the figure Tallhovers is real, but Tallhover’s death seems invented, and so he decided to write *Schädlich* that Tallhover should not die (Grass 2000, 27).

2.2. Hoftaller – Grass

How Grass has allowed Tallhover to live on as Hoftaller, the long-term companion of the multi-faceted Fonty / Fontane in the novel *Too far a Field*, is subject of the interview *The author and his covert investigator* (Grass 1997). Grass’ motivation lies in the fact that he had perceived the unification of Germany as an Anschluss executed by colonial rulers, against which he had protested through essays and speeches and finally through the novel *Too far a Field*.

For Grass, the process of unification from 89/90 failed and he sees it parallel to the three unification wars, the Bismarckian unity, the Wilhelminian period (Grass 2000, 27). Therefore, Grass lets the realistic German author (Theodor) Fontane (1819 – 18980) „einen sehr aufmerksamen Zeugen, Mitläufer und Kritiker des Entwicklungsprozesses in Preußen – Deutschland, (...) der zu seiner Zeit die Rolle als zivilen Bürgers, der sich also nicht in Fanatismus, in Hass, in Eindeutigkeit verliert“⁸ (Grass 1997, 256) appear as the character Theo Wuttke in connection with the fall of the Berlin Wall, permanently accompanied by his day-and-night shadow, his protector Hoftaller.

The repeatability of the history is illustrated, among other things, by the fact that a significant part of the novel takes place around and in the House of

⁸ “a very attentive witness, follower and critic of the development process in Prussia - Germany, (...) who had played in his time the role of a civilian citizen who did not lose himself in fanaticism, hate, unambiguity”.

Ministries. The building had been in the government district since Prussian times, from 1935 it had housed the Ministry of Aviation of the 3rd Reich, in the GDR the House of Ministries and after the revolution the Treuhand (fiduciary). Here Wuttke gets to know his future wife; here Hoftaller finds himself a place as a courier, after he had made himself unpopular as GDR travelling cultural representative and was not allowed any longer to give lectures.

For a long time his agent, his spy, had protected him. What Hoftaller associates with Tallhover is above all the order fanaticism. He understands his supervising activity as caring. His surveillance object must not be broken, but must be protected from doing the wrong thing in the sense of order, ultimately in front of oneself. "Das ist unsere Republik, die wir schützen müssen und ich, Hoftaller, will nur dafür sorgen, dass derjenige, den Sie bitte beobachten sollen, von Fehlern gewarnt wird, damit er dem Klassenfeind nicht auf dem Leim geht. Fürsorglich – vorsorglich wollen wir ihn davor schützen"⁹ (Grass 1999, 17).

Hoftaller's compulsion to order extends perfidiously until the process of unification. He pursues this compulsion presenting himself as a technocrat of the Stasi, and it seems as if he had helped to manipulate the revolution/German unification. Through him, Grass makes German unity appear also as a Stasi product.

Like Tallhover in his time, Hoftaller is able to stay active across systems. In his eyes, every new system calls for order, which has to be monitored in order to stay intact. Thus, in the end of the book, he is already active for some time in Central America.

The surveillance object/spy relationship, a burning GDR theme on the one hand, and the already mentioned repeatability of German history on the other hand is represented almost graphically in the chapter *Am Abgrund*¹⁰, where the collective of authors is imagining the pair Fonty – Hoftaller walking beside each other under an open umbrella, multiplied, so that they appear as a funeral procession.

Schädlich considered his character Tallhover misused by Grass (Schädlich 2001). For him, the almost likeable Hoftaller represents a populist trivialization the oppression system of Stasi.

⁹ "This is our republic which we must protect and I, Hoftaller, just want to make sure that one, who I spy on, is stopped to make mistakes. Caring - as a precaution we want to protect him from mistakes."

¹⁰ *At the Abyss*

3. No comfortable dictatorship

Grass describes the GDR dictatorship as a comfortable with regard to its own citizens as compared to other Eastern Bloc dictatorships, such as the Romanian or Soviet ones. Such dictatorships also need their henchmen, who, the worse the dictatorship seems, the more inhuman they are (Zimmermann 1999, 248).

3.1. Herta Müller's faceless secret agent

As in the case of Tallhover, among whose first objects of persecution we find Herwegh, or Hoftaller, whose one and only known object of persecution is Fontane's doppelgänger, in Herta Müller's *Herztier* the "objects of persecution" are poets, but their pursuers are, by contrast somehow likeable, caring Hoftaller, criminal.

Müller narrates in her novel how four German philology students whose fathers had been with the SS, George, Kurt, Edgar and the "I narrator", how they become closer on the occasion of the suicide of another colleague, and how they come to be followed by every step by the Securitate until 3 of them emigrate to Germany while the fourth commits suicide. However, emigration does not mean liberation from persecution for the first person narrator and for Georg it means death.

In Herta Müller's novel the *Securitate* is omnipresent, the persecutors let the dictator be felt everywhere and the surveillance is no longer a secret. The pursuers are at first nameless and faceless, are called "die Wächter – the guards", on the occasion of a house search at Edgars, his father calls them "der mit der Glatze – the bald one" (Müller 2009, 39) and "der mit grauem Haar – the gray haired" (Müller 2009, 39). Much later in the novel, the one "Wächter" will also be given a name, after having invaded the lives of the four friends, continuing to dominate them. We find out, that he is captain Pjele (skin), whose name is the same as his dogs'. He has a name that never stands out (Müller 2009, 89). Pjele is responsible for the persecution and interrogation of the four friends who have frequent contact with him. Nevertheless, they cannot place Pjele anywhere. "Wir konnten uns die Gedanken von Hauptmann Pjele nicht vorstellen. Je mehr wir darüber nachdachten, umso weniger verstanden wir. [...] Ich wusste nie, was über Hauptmann Pjele zu sagen wäre, was richtig war"¹¹ (Müller 2009, 114). The image of the secret service agent responsible for the atmosphere of constant persecution

¹¹ "We could not imagine Captain Pjele's thoughts. The more we thought about it, the less we understood. [...] I never knew what to say about Captain Pjele, something that was right."

also by inciting closest friends to spy on each other is the embodiment of the dictatorship.

Pjele can only be defined by his behavior towards his objects of persecution and also by concise, ambiguous, cynical statements. He represents Ceaușescu's dictatorship; he belongs to the clearly separate group of oppressors opposing the OTHERS.

3.2. Gerd Ungureanu's story of the revolution

We do not find in *Musette, oder die mörderische Frage nach dem kleinen Unterschied*¹² (Ungureanu 2004) such a clear dividing line between the *securitate* representatives - secret agents - and the rest of the world as in *Herztier*¹³. The author introduces us to a paranoid world in which everyone is somehow involved with the *Securitate* and serves it. Agents, students, professors, journalists, a magician, and a rank-high security officer populate this novel. Collaborators and officers have names, faces and personal stories. It is difficult to sort them according to the categories good - evil.

Ungureanu tells the story of the DPA¹⁴ German journalist Kurt Hall who is active in Romania and his daughter Anna, who decides to study medicine in Bucharest in order to be with her father and their involvement in the events of 1989. Kurt and Anna are, besides a shepherd from the village of Floarea, the only ones in the novel who are not serviceable to the Romanian secret service. A complete *Securitate* apparatus seems to be active only for spying on the German journalist, including his young girlfriend Alexandra Nowak and the Romanian Agerpres¹⁵ correspondent Popescu, who report on him to their case officer. The magician Retas, who eventually turns out to be a *Securitate* officer as well, helps Anna Hall and her university professor Andrei Cretzu to escape abroad, because the latter had been persecuted for distributing leaflets against Ceaușescu.

Ungureanu's secret agents are motivated by no ideology or philosophy of life. There are personal reasons such as ambition, the desire for a special, adventurous life or the fear for their families and their lives, which had influenced the career choice of these men.

The figure of the omnipresent General Coman relates mostly to the immortal Hoftaller, who had been working already as Tallhover for various political systems,

¹² *Muesette, or the murderous question about the small difference.*

¹³ *The Land of Green Plums.*

¹⁴ German Press Agency.

¹⁵ Romanian Press Agency.

and who gives the impression he had co-manipulated the revolution of 1989. Just as Hoftaller, Coman also appears as mastermind of the events of December '89.

4. The dissolution of "I"

Wofgang Hillbig belongs to the GDR writers who had left the country during the mid-eighties, having previously been under surveillance of the Stasi. After the revolution, he found out, that his brother had also been recruited by the Stasi to inform on him.

Hilbig's novel hero from *I*, the spy M aka W aka C von Cambert also has to spy on a writer, "Reader", who organizes private "kitchen and living room readings" (Hilbig 2003, 52) in the Berlin cultural underground. Cambert describes himself as Reader's most attentive reader and best recipient.

Cambert's persecutors had forced him into being an informer by appearing constantly at his work place, so that his colleagues had considered him to be a spy and avoided him, even before he had signed the declaration of agreement.

He escapes from the small town A where he lives with his mother, and lets everyone know that he is moving to Leipzig in an attempt to escape his pursuers. He hides in Berlin, where his new Berlin supervisor finds him in the room he had rented from a certain Mrs. Falbe. He has to move into an official residence, accept the code name Cambert and start spying on "Reader". The moment Cambert no longer escapes his pursuers and as soon as he accepts the cooperation with the Stasi, his literary work is successful. Every time he tries to escape, his writing has to suffer.

The plot of the novel *I* reaches from the spring of 1985 until the winter of 1988/1989, a period in which Cambert moves from the small town A to Berlin, his collaboration with the Stasi begins, he publishes poems in Eastern anthologies, in the Federal Republic and in unofficial Eastern magazines, he is invited to read for the underground literary scene, and writes reports about the participants, he pursues Reader and discredits him, he gets involved with two women, he manages to escape the spy activity three times, is arrested, gets banned from Berlin, and finally returns to the town A, still active as an unofficial collaborator of the Stasi. The plot scenes are mostly cellars, cafes, stations, and the events are not set in a chronological order.

Cambert has a single contact person in Berlin, the leading officer Feuerbach. Planned meetings with him take place irregularly, Feuerbach never appears in time, he drops unexpectedly by his spy's official residence, confusing Cambert's sense of chronology.

Feuerbach's remarks and descriptions suggest a frightening image of the oppressing apparatus, in which Cambert is caught like an insect in a spider web. Cambert's place in the system is that of a little spy who knows neither his colleagues nor his superior's superiors. The whole structure around him appears as a creation of the Stasi apparatus, the whole reality is in fact a simulation (Hilbig 2003, 158).

The initially suspected underground culture is actually portrayed as a creation of the state Security. Not only Cambert is an informer, eventually it turns out, that his target, Reader – the founder of the underground culture – is also a Stasi collaborator. Thus, one can conclude that there are more spies in the underground cultural scene than persecuted persons. The only goal seems to be to find out who else wants to escape to Western Germany, who might be the next homeland refugee, in order to justify the existence of the oppressive apparatus.

Why doesn't M alias W alias C of Cambert finally escape the system? Because he cannot exist as a writer in the Western system. His whole existence, his literary creations, his environment are owned by the oppressive system, which he in his turn needs, so that his existence would get structure and meaning (Sistig 2003).

The story of this little spy has a certain credibility, because after 1989, it became known that the state security had surveyed the alternative art scene of the district of Prenzlauer Berg with the help of unofficial collaborators. The best-known case is that of author Sascha Anderson, who was part of the alternative cultural scene, and who became known after the fall of the wall to pass on information to state security about his fellow writers from the underground.

5. Conclusions

One of the things the characters presented in this paper have in common is that their targets are writers. Tallhover was pursuing Hervegh, Hoftaller Fontane – Fonty, in *Herztier* the author's young writer colleagues are the targets and in *Musette* the targets are intellectuals, professors and students of the Bucharest Philology Faculty and Cambert is spying on Reader, one of the founders of the East Berlin underground literary scene.

These characters of spies are a literary embodiment of dictatorship because they contribute to creating a distorted world, in which everybody can be controlled and driven.

The general picture is that of a repressive apparatus that becomes independent of its creators, that creates situations and facts, which it can later then defute, in order to justify its existence. In most cases, neither the victims of this oppressive apparatus, nor their persecutors have a way out, because eventually, even after a change of political regime, the pattern persecutor – persecuted is repeated.

There is a personal interest in the subject, induced by the fact that the plot of Gerd Ungureanu's novel is located among other's at the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest, during a period when I was a student there, and the place where Alexandra Nowak supposedly reported to her leading officer is a house in Pitar Mos street, which I have passed by daily, for four years.

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