

Jill E. Twark
Humor, Satire, and Identity



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and Identity

Eastern German Literature in the 1990s

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Introduction

Humor and Satire as Responses to the *Wende*

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Eastern German authors have added a great many humorous and satirical works to the German literary corpus. Their texts contribute to a general trend toward the comic genre in literature, film, and cabaret in unified Germany.¹ I began researching this trend after attending a seminar with Prof. Walfried Hartinger at the Universität Leipzig in 1993, in which Bernd Schirmer and Thomas Rosenlöcher read from their recently published satirical novels. Since then diverse artworks expanding this trend have been treated in media and scholarly forums.² Up to now, however, scholars have either focused on one specific satirical genre or narrative technique like the Bakhtinian carnivalesque (Symmank 2002), the "naïve gaze" (Nause 2002), or the grotesque (Marven and Sich, both 2005); on how comical novels depict the GDR (Igel 2005); on film comedies (Naughton 2002); or on articles and *Ossi-Wessi* jokes from the East(ern) German satirical magazine "Eulenspiegel" (Howell 2004). Despite the wealth of secondary literature examining various artworks and particular humorous or satirical strategies, the wider phenomenon of Eastern German humor and satire in literary texts, appearing in various genres and as a broad reaction not only to the end of the GDR, but also to postwall Eastern German experiences and the West, remains to be explored.

The fall 1989 revolution, referred to in German as the *Wende* or "turn of events," and the subsequent unification of Germany on October 3, 1990, drastically altered the lives of Germans from the German Democratic Republic (GDR). While Western Germans bore the brunt of financing unification, Eastern Germans not only faced entirely new structures on a daily basis, but after the initial euphoria passed they also

1 In the early 1990s, for example, the number of cabaret troupes in Leipzig increased from two to nine.

2 Walfried Hartinger and Christine Cosentino were among the first scholars to discuss works belonging to this group (Hartinger, "Texte nach der Wende: Versuch eines Überblicks," *Berliner LeseZeichen* 6+7 (1995): 55-65 and Cosentino, "Scherz, Satire und Ironie in der ostdeutschen Literatur der neunziger Jahre," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 10 (1998): 467-487). A wide range of secondary literature on the topics of satire, humor, and related modes in postwall literature and film is provided in the bibliography, section 2.3.

were forced to deal with mass unemployment, the influx of Western cultural values, and a sudden rupture in their personal lives.³ Given the weight of these issues, it may come as a surprise that humor and satire are key devices in Eastern German literary texts dealing with the complicated transition from an oppressive socialist regime to a free-market democracy. However, these texts emerge out of an established satirical tradition in GDR literature. Written under new, less restrictive circumstances, they represent both a continuation of and a break with this tradition. The multiple functions of satire and humor—to attack, criticize, educate, conciliate, and/or entertain—also provide important clues as to why these modes have been employed so frequently. As responses to lived experience, they can help artists and their public come to terms with difficult new social circumstances. In an interview with the Eastern German author Bernd Schirmer in June 1999, I asked him whether his humorous and satirical stance may have helped his readers to come to terms with the time following unification. He replied:

Das auf alle Fälle. Also das habe ich bei Lesungen gemerkt oder in Briefen, die mir geschrieben worden sind. Das ist doch für manche sehr heilsam gewesen. Sie sind einfach dadurch mit manchen Dingen leichter fertig geworden, in dem sie gemerkt haben, es geht nicht nur ihnen so. Und ihr Schicksal ist wert genug gewesen, literarisch behandelt zu werden. Das ist im Osten so gewesen. Im Westen war es eigentlich ein Stück Aufklärung, ein gewisses Aha-Erlebnis, würde ich sagen: so larmoyant und so verbiestert sind die im Osten also gar nicht. Die können ja sogar über sich selbst lachen. Das war sehr wichtig.⁴ (Appendix 1, 318)

This testimony, echoed by other authors represented here, confirms these Eastern German literary contributions to be valuable cultural documents that focus attention on GDR and post-*Wende* experiences. Despite, and perhaps because of, their often harsh, critical contents, these texts expose truths about East(ern) German experiences that media and official historical records may miss or intentionally ignore.⁵

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- 3 Throughout this study, I refer to Germans who lived in the GDR as "East Germans," and those living in the east after October 3, 1990 as "Eastern Germans." Correspondingly, "West Germans" refer to residents of the former Federal Republic, and "Western Germans" refer to residents from the western part of unified Germany. While I am aware of the reductionism involved in referring to all Germans simply as "Eastern Germans" and "Western Germans," since the authors whose texts I analyze refer to each group in this way (by nature humor and satire are reductive modes which frequently rely on stereotypes and generalizations) and for the sake of brevity, I am compelled to use these terms here.
- 4 This interview was originally published under the title "So larmoyant sind sie im Osten gar nicht: Gespräch mit Bernd Schirmer" in *GDR Bulletin* 26 (1999): 39-44.
- 5 See Oliver Igel, *Gab es die DDR wirklich? Die Darstellung des SED-Staates in komischer Prosa zur "Wende"* (Tönning: Der Andere, 2005) 13; Roswitha Skare, "Zeitgeschichte im Roman. Vom Sinn oder Unsinn des Wartens auf den Wenderoman," *"Zeitenwende – die Germanistik auf dem Weg vom 20. ins 21. Jahrhundert"*. *Akten des X. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses Wien*

There are many possible explanations for this widespread cultural phenomenon. Some can be derived from theories of human psychology and the aesthetic functions of satire and humor, and others from the specific sociohistorical context of German unification.⁶ One particularly fitting explanation can be deduced from the philosopher Immanuel Kant's assertion that laughter is the result of a tensed expectation that suddenly ends in nothing. Kant argues that everything which produces laughter is somehow absurd and, therefore, contrary to human reason.⁷ Compared to the high expectations on both sides of the wall, the immediate results of unification in the East, including high unemployment, insecurity about the future, and bruised identities, indeed appear absurdly unplanned. These dashed expectations provoke laughter, but also cynical and grotesque responses. Sigmund Freud postulates that the lower the level of inhibition or repression, the greater the enjoyment of humor.⁸ This link suggests a further psychological explanation for a humorous reaction to the *Wende*. Having lived in a repressive society, GDR citizens suddenly gained the opportunity to release their pent-up emotions of anger, frustration, and disappointment. One productive way to do this was through satirical and humorous writing, with which they could suddenly lampoon and criticize freely, without fear of governmental censorship. Scholars like Joachim Ritter, Wolfgang Ertl, and Sabrina Born support the idea of humor as an act of liberation—or, as Ertl calls it, "ein trotz alledem befreiendes Lachen in schwerer Zeit"(37)—for GDR authors after unification.⁹

2000, ed. Peter Wiesinger, vol. 7, 75-80, 76; and Twark, "'Ko...Ko...Kononialismus,' said the giraffe: Humorous and Satirical Responses to German Unification," *Textual Responses to German Unification: Processing Historical and Social Change in Literature and Film*, ed. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, Rachel J. Halverson, and Kristie A. Foell (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2001) 151-169, 151-153.

- 6 The following theoretical arguments for the proliferation of humorous and satirical texts following German unification have appeared in slightly altered form in "Mathias Wedel and Matthias Biskupek: Two Satirists 'im Wandel der Wende'," *glossen* 10 (2000), 19 January 2001 <<http://alpha.dickinson.edu/departments/germn/glossen/heft10/twark.html>> and Twark, "'Ko...Ko...Kononialismus" 151-153.
- 7 "Kritik der Urteilskraft," *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. 5, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1957) 437.
- 8 *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1961) 96. Freud's theory serves paradigmatically here for other attempts to explain predominant cultural codes from a psychological perspective.
- 9 Ritter, "Über das Lachen," in Steffen Dietzsch, ed., *Lucifer Lacht: Philosophische Betrachtungen von Nietzsche bis Tabari* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1993), 92-118; Ertl, "Denn die Mühlen der Ebene lagen hinter uns und vor uns die Mühlen der Berge': Thomas Rosenlöchers diaristische Prosa zum Ende der DDR," *Literatur und politische Aktualität*, ed. Elrud Ibsch and Ferdinand von Ingen (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1993), 21-37; and Born, "Frei sein wollen und frei sein können: Die Wende und ihre Folgen in der deutschen Erzählliteratur," Magisterarbeit, Freie Universität Berlin, Wintersemester 1996/97.

Not that there is no censorship in free-market democracies; this censorship just happens to be based on market demands, religious beliefs, or "political correctness" rather than on official government policies. When asked whether he was aware of any taboo topics in postwall Germany, the Eastern German satirist Matthias Biskupek replied:

Ich kann ja über alles schreiben, nur es wird nicht alles veröffentlicht. Im Moment haben wir ja auch eine "mainstream" Meinung, besser wir hatten sie. In Sachen Krieg in Jugoslawien gab es sie. In allen Organen steht konkret ein bißchen was anderes, in Sachen Kritik an der katholischen Kirche, Abtreibungsregelungen oder so was. Im Prinzip wird in den großen Medien dazu nichts veröffentlicht. Aber ich kann meine Meinung schon veröffentlichen, aber eben in Winkelblättern [bei kleinen Verlagen].¹⁰

One essential problem for Eastern German satirists, as for other Eastern authors following the *Wende*, was no longer to avoid government regulation by practicing self-censorship, but rather to figure out which topics would sell well and thus attract the best publishers. Referring specifically to this authorial struggle to find a receptive audience, the literary scholar Daniel Sich dismantles the more blatantly satirical texts like Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir* or Jens Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* for depicting the GDR as an "Absurditätenshow," because he believes these authors "sold out" to the market by compromising the literary quality of their texts in order to reach a wide public.¹¹ While "[d]as Publikum goutiert humoristisches Schreiben," a "kraftlose Form entsteht, wenn der Witz auf Kosten der literarischen Substanz geht" (Sich, "Absurditätenshow"). Sich's critiques of the literary quality of many such texts are legitimate. No one would consider Brussig's or Sparschuh's writing style or philosophical depth to be on a par with that of Heinrich Böll or Günter Grass. Furthermore, their overdetermined wordplays and effluent monologues do eventually become tiresome. Nonetheless, such critiques do not diminish the fact that these texts reached a wide audience in the 1990s. Over 170,000 copies of *Helden wie wir* (to date in its thirteenth paperback edition) and 100,000 copies of *Simple Storys* have been sold,¹² and the paperback version of *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* is in its eleventh edition. All three novels have been adapted into theater plays and/or films and thus received repeated

10 Twark, Jill, "Satireshreiben vor und nach der Wende: Interview mit Matthias Biskupek," *GDR Bulletin* 26 (1999): 45-53, 50 and Appendix 2.

11 "Die DDR als Absurditätenshow – Vom Schreiben nach der Wende," *Glossen* 21 (2005) <<http://alpha.dickinson.edu/departments/germn/glossen/heft21/absurdaeten.html>>.

12 Wiebke Horstmann, S. Fischer Verlag, "Re: Kontaktanfrage von twarkj@ecu.edu an Abt. Verkauf und Vertrieb," Email to the author, 29 June 2007; Ralf Pannemann, Berlin Verlag, "Re: Schulze, Simple Storys," Email to the author, 27 June 2007.

spectator and media attention.¹³ They have contributed to lively debates on the GDR past, German unification, and what constitute the most appropriate and aesthetically potent means of depicting past and present.

What I find most fascinating about these texts is that they inhabit what might be called a "grey zone" between high and low literature, which had been divided strictly in the GDR into the categories *Eliteliteratur* and *Unterhaltungsliteratur*. Tellingly, Brussig's novel has been treated both by Moritz Baßler in *Der deutsche Pop-Roman. Die neuen Archivisten* (2002) as an example of a new, widespread German movement toward producing popular literature, and by other scholars as *the* paradigmatic *Wenderoman*. Journalists, scholars, and students have already devoted thousands of pages to analyzing its psychoanalytical symbolism, literary precedents, picaresque narrator, and so forth. Apparently, personal opinions of what constitute literary quality do not always influence the popular success, potential cultural-political influences, or scholarly attention devoted to any given text. Reading (or viewing) pleasure and historical timing can play equally important roles. These factors have boosted the success of post-unification humor and satire.

A further reason for the postwall proliferation of satirical texts is thus the sociohistorical context in which they were produced. When two distinct cultures interact, their members become aware of cultural differences, some of which are bound to appear odd or comical because of their obvious incongruities. The stereotypes and cultural differences that developed between East and West Germany over the course of forty years could not and have not dissolved instantaneously. Friedrich Georg Jünger and Helmut Arntzen's observation that satire is often used as a literary form in transitional times such as during or after wars or when political systems change, to root out antiquated institutions and behaviors while ushering in the new, buttresses this argument.¹⁴ In releasing their emotions while criticizing society, artists and their public aspire to speed up the process of coming to terms with the past. In absorbing the GDR into the larger Federal Republic, the latter turned GDR citizens into denigrated and disadvantaged Others; being the economically and politically smaller and weaker of the two Germanies, East Germany was not able to assert itself during the unification process. Except for the

13 *Helden wie wir*, dir. Sebastian Peterson, Senator, 1999 and dir. Peter Dehler, Deutsches Theater Berlin, September 2001; *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*, Peter Timm, Senator 2000 and dir. Oliver Reese, Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin, September 1996; and *Simple Storys*, dir. Lukas Langhoff, Neue Szene Theater Leipzig, October 1998.

14 Jünger, *Über das Komische* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1949, orig. 1936), quoted in Joachim W. Jaeger, *Humor und Satire in der DDR* 29-30 and Arntzen, *Satire in der deutschen Literatur: Geschichte und Theorie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989) 44-45.

"grüner Pfeil" allowing traffic to turn right on red and the right to abortion, nearly all Eastern laws were usurped by Western ones overnight on October 3, 1990. The clash of cultures brought about by German unification lends itself to humorous treatment precisely because of the contrasts that remained between Eastern and Western German social, economic, and political structures, despite the (initially superficial) overlay of Western laws and ideologies on the East.

The catchy and politically charged phrase "Zukunft ist Herkunft"¹⁵—one's origins are one's future—indicates the primary dilemma with which Eastern German citizens were confronted after the fall of the wall: no matter how well they succeeded in adapting to changes, the hurdles they encountered were not only psychological, sociopolitical, and economic ones, but included prejudice and disdain from the West. Regardless of what the Easterners do, they bear a stigma because of their different background. Joachim Ritter theorized that wherever and for whatever reason a dominant and accepted reality shuts out the possibility for other realities or declares them to be invalid, laughter is the means by which those marginalized in this manner can make themselves heard:

In der Welt des Humors [...] wird damit das Lachen zu der Macht, die dieses Abseitige festhält, so wie sie es findet, als das Nürrische und Lächerliche, um zugleich von ihm her die vorgegebene und angemäße Ordnung der verständigen Welt in Frage zu stellen, durchsichtig zu machen und selbst der Lächerlichkeit preiszugeben (*Luzifer Lacht* 117).

Through laughter the marginalized can call the dominant order into question and thereby assert their existence. By reproducing their identity in relation to the dominant culture and laughing at it, the marginalized act out their belonging to this group. Thus, in adding their voices of laughter and of protest to the realm of the public sphere through cultural activism, Eastern Germans can contribute at least to the acknowledgement of their existence as a distinct group within the larger German context, and perhaps raise their status in this context since they cannot be viewed as passively accepting their position as Other. By depicting ambiguous, active protagonists, Eastern German authors explode the stereotype of the passive, conformist, socialist subject. A person who uses humor or satire distances herself from the object of this humor. In difficult circumstances, humor also bolsters morale. Through satire, authors can simultaneously distance themselves from and express dismay at social issues in a playful manner that prevents their critiques from appearing overly plaintive.

15 Steffen Dietzsch uses this phrase in an interview with Odo Marquard to refer to the East German situation after 1989, "'Das Lachen ist die kleine Theodizee.' Odo Marquard im Gespräch mit Steffen Dietzsch," *Luzifer Lacht: Philosophische Betrachtungen von Nietzsche bis Tabari*, ed. Steffen Dietzsch (Leipzig: Reclam, 1993) 8-21, 8.

Considering the Western German condemnation of Easterners as whiners (*Jammerer*) after the *Wende*, it was important for the latter to empower themselves and to strengthen their identities as a self-confident *Trotzidentität* that can be respected, and not a pitiful *Jammerossi-Identität*, by countering this stereotype. The East Berlin reporter and author Daniela Dahn argued for this position in the mid-1990s, despite its potentially problematic connotations of being immature or unconciliatory, in *Westwärts und nicht vergessen: Das Unbehagen in der Einheit*.¹⁶

In order to analyze and eventually characterize this trend, granting it the in-depth treatment it deserves, I have thus selected ten representative prose texts to examine in detail. This text selection is based on four essential criteria. First, the texts had to have been written by Eastern German authors who grew up in the GDR. Whether or not the authors had written humorous or satirical texts prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall is not essential, since I concentrate on their texts as reactions to this particular historical event. Second, each fictional text had to historicize and/or depict a coming-to-terms either with the GDR past or the unification process and its immediate effects primarily on Eastern German citizens, since unification has had a much greater impact on former GDR citizens than on former *Bundesbürger*. Thus the narrated time frame is restricted to the period between 1945 and the mid-1990s. Third, each text had to have been written in a predominantly humorous or satirical mode, assuming that humor and satire include the ironic, picaresque, and grotesque modes. Finally, the texts had to be written in prose and of novel or near-novel length. According to Stephen Brockmann, "[i]t is mostly in prose literature that western societies confront larger social problems from the vantage point and with the prestige of what one might call, using concepts developed by Peter Bürger with respect to art in general, the "institution literature."¹⁷ Bürger's designation of literature as an "institution" in bourgeois societies, similar to the church or the state, fortifies my argument that prose texts like the ones discussed here function autonomously. Longer prose texts allow authors to say more about their experiences, providing details, anecdotes, and (auto)biographical information generally not found in drama or poetry. Furthermore, prose works tend to be accessible to a broader audience than drama or poetry (although, arguably, less accessible than film). The wide popularity of the majority of these works, which have reached many people in both the Eastern and Western parts of Germany, as well as other parts of the world, attests to their topical significance. In

16 Berlin: Rowohlt, 1996, 7-10.

17 *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1999) 19. Brockmann quotes Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1974) 15.

order to assess not only the texts themselves, but also their effects on Eastern and Western German readers, I conducted interviews with six of the ten Eastern German authors highlighted here between 1993 and 2000.¹⁸

The central questions addressed in this study are: Why have so many Eastern German authors utilized humor and satire in their post-*Wende* texts? Whom or what do these authors target or reinforce? Which specific modes of humor and satire do they employ to achieve their aesthetic and political goals? How do their texts contribute to the establishment of a distinct, Eastern German identity? The concept of "identity" can be defined simply as the "answer to the question of who somebody is."¹⁹ The answer to this simple question, however, requires complex descriptions and analyses. Individual personalities are constructed from multiple sources, including aspects beyond one's control (race, gender) and conscious choices (career, freetime activities, place of residence). As Konrad H. Jarausch has stated, identity issues not only relate to individuals, but also to how these individuals relate to each other within groups, how nations define themselves internally and within the world community, and how individual and/or group identities are manifested in cultural products (*After Unity* 5). Here I focus on how Eastern German satirical literature as a particular brand of cultural product reflects and (de)constructs prevailing notions of an Eastern German identity. Does the specific GDR tradition of humorous and satirical literature still inform post-unification Eastern German texts and if so, how? Do these authors promote a specific utopian vision, or have they lost such a vision with the demise of the GDR's socialist experiment? Above all, how do Eastern German humorous and satirical texts function within the larger contexts of post-unification Eastern Germany and of German society as a whole? Dividing these texts into four categories, according to their specific satirical genres, enables me to highlight commonalities and differences between them and to answer the above questions systematically.

18 The authors are Matthias Biskupek, Volker Braun, Thomas Rosenlöcher, Bernd Schirmer, Jens Sparschuh, and Reinhard Ulbrich. All authors have graciously allowed me to include excerpts within my analyses and, except for Braun, in full text in the Appendices.

19 Christian Meier, *Die Nation, die keine sein will* (München: Hanser, 1991), cited in Konrad H. Jarausch, "Reshaping German Identities: Reflections on the Post-Unification Debate," Introduction to *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, Modern German Studies Series, vol. 2 (Providence, RI: Berghahn, 1997) 1-23, 4.

A Typology of Satirical Genres in Eastern German Texts

Exploring a diverse range of satirical texts produced in the 1990s, I discovered many characteristics that tie them together. All incorporate linguistic playfulness, a plethora of intertextual references, and typical characters—usually stereotypical Easterners and Westerners. I attribute these similarities not only to the nature of satire in general, but also to biographical factors, including the authors' ages, length and type of East and West German experience, and worldviews, as well as to their shared literary influences and attitudes toward unification. Despite many similarities, the works also display significant differences. Some authors embrace unification, while others display nostalgia for the GDR (expressed after unification as "Ostalgie," contracting "Ost" or "East" with "Nostalgie"), and yet others, while attacking the GDR, simultaneously express disillusionment and frustration at the loss of their home country's Marxist utopian experiment. The ten novels I have selected here, therefore, have been divided into chapters based on their subject matter and dominant satirical approaches: self-irony as a form of self-defense, the picaresque, ironic realism, and the grotesque. This grouping also takes into consideration each text's publication date, narrated time frame, and narrative point-of-view.

Chapter 1 features three immediate responses to the fall of the Berlin Wall by Thomas Rosenlöcher (*Die Wiederentdeckung des Gehens beim Wandern*), Bernd Schirmer (*Schlehwins Giraffe*), and Jens Sparschuh (*Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*). In these texts a first-person narrator deploys self-irony to critique, and thereby come to terms with, the events following the *Wende*. Since these texts were written so soon after the wall fell, between 1990 and 1995, the humorous and satirical strategies the authors adopt do not reflect a confident mastery of the subject. Rather, they convey a bafflement or helplessness as to how to put unification experiences into words. Because their protagonists belong to the literary type of the "loser" or antihero, the authors' approach often appears more defensive than aggressive. The time and space in which each narrator lives and acts—like that of all Eastern characters in these novels—is what Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner call "liminal," in other words, lodged between two distinct political systems. From this "liminal" vantage point, the protagonists in these three texts seek meaning in their past and present lives and construct new realities for themselves by reflecting on, calling attention to, and generating a new, post-*Wende* language.

Language in the GDR held other connotations for East Germans than for Westerners, consisting as it did of two distinct communicative perspectives: a public and a private discourse, both of which were

influenced greatly by official government rhetoric and rather homogenous living conditions compared to the West:

auch die private Kommunikation der DDR-Deutschen kam als Folge der sehr engen Vorgaben durch das offizielle Formelsystem und der im ganzen Land gleichförmig herrschenden Lebensbedingungen mit einem [. . .] stark reduzierten System sprachlicher Zeichen aus, die mehr als nur auf einen konkreten Fall angewandt wurden und dabei allerdings eine sehr viel stärkere Aussagekraft als formal identische sprachliche Zeichen im Westen hatten.²⁰

GDR citizens carefully considered the context and the origin of any discourse before judging its meaning and truth content.²¹ After the *Wende*, many words or phrases like "abhauen" (indicating both "to leave" and "to defect to the West"), "Sieger der Geschichte" (the phrase applied to the communists' role as victors in the inevitable development toward communism as the apex of human history), or even "kaufen"—which referred to an existential struggle in the East, and a pleasurable free-time activity in the West—have now lost their former connotations and/or come to be used ironically.²² Most authors in this study revel in the fact that they can now play freely with socialist language. Taking a ludic approach, they mock it and free themselves from its formerly repulsive, propagandistic aura, but also preserve it for the amusement and amazement of current and future generations. Because entering into western society is not perceived as entirely liberating, they also deride the language of capitalism, which includes the jargon of the Western German and U.S. marketing and public relations industries. Their linguistic playfulness resists the propagandistic nature of language in any ideological system, forcing the reader to slow down, ponder this use of language and the objects to which it refers, and consider its implications. Although such linguistic playfulness became the trademark of GDR authors like Volker Braun (b. 1934), poets and cabarettists like Hansgeorg Stengel (1922-2003), and the avant-garde Prenzlauer Berg poets, its abundance within long Eastern German prose texts, rare in the GDR, appears now to be a more mainstream phenomenon in the East. In keeping with the focus of this study on postwall satirical discourse as it is tied to identity, the authors' use of language is examined in each chapter.

20 Horst Dieter Schlosser, "Ostidentität mit Westmarken? Die 'dritte Sprache' in Ingo Schulzes *Simple Storys* zwischen DDR-Deutsch und Bundesdeutsch," *An der Jahrtausendwende. Schlaglichter auf die deutsche Literatur*. Frankfurter Forschungen zur Kultur- und Sprachwissenschaft 6, ed. Christine Cosentino, Wolfgang Ertl and Wolfgang Müller (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2003) 53-68, 58.

21 Tiffany Howell, *V/banished Identities: The Case of Eastern German Humor*, unpublished diss., U of California-Berkeley, 2004, 138.

22 Schlosser 56-58 and Howell 138. Howell cites "Es ist ein anderes Leben," *Der Spiegel* 39 (1990): 34-61, 45.

Chapter 2 unites three picaresque texts by Thomas Brussig, Matthias Biskupek, and Reinhard Ulbrich, published between 1995 and 1998. These texts—*Helden wie wir*, *Der Quotensachse*, and *Spur der Broiler*—are all fictional autobiographies with subversive, rogue "heroes" who promote a more conscious and assertive distancing from and reckoning with the GDR. Tracing the protagonists' lives from birth to adulthood in the GDR and then continuing briefly past unification, these satires illustrate the personal rupture which the *Wende* initiated in the narrators' biographies. These three authors highlight the paradoxical relationship between the restrictive socialist system and the main characters' relative freedom in their personal lives. Unification affects each narrator differently, depending on how he led his life in the GDR. While Brussig and Biskupek supply their protagonists with megalomaniacal character traits, displaying a harsh variety of satire, Ulbrich's pliable narrator conveys a more nostalgic view of the past. In this chapter I engage with Tanja Nause's argument that the narrative technique of the "naïve gaze" should replace the term "picaresque" in describing postwall satirical texts like *Helden wie wir*. I agree with Nause that the terms picaresque and the corresponding German term "Schelmenroman" have been overused and frequently applied improperly in the discourse surrounding postwall literature. Nevertheless, I disagree with her that novels like *Helden wie wir* should not be treated as picaresque. I argue instead that such texts reconfigure the picaresque genre to promote through its satirical potential specific ways of remembering East Germany that both feed into and contradict predominant views of "what it was really like" to live there by granting their protagonists human agency and the ability to maneuver successfully through a repressive GDR society and a new, post-*Wende* situation.

In Chapter 3, two self-confident, ironic realist novels by Erich Loest and Ingo Schulze, *Katerfrühstück* (1992) and *Simple Stories: Ein Roman aus der ostdeutschen Provinz* (1998), represent the more subtle end of the spectrum of post-1989 literature that is constructed with the conventions of the satirical mode. Their works do not rely on magical realism, fairy tales, or the fantastic to provoke laughter or to launch satirical attacks as all other texts discussed here do. Their works can further be distinguished from the six texts above in that they provide multiple views of the post-unification period, not restricting their narratives to the first-person perspective of a single, Eastern German character. Loest's novel is of particular interest because it presents unification from both Eastern and Western perspectives. The only Eastern German author in the group to have lived for an extended period of time in the Federal Republic prior to unification, Loest delves the deepest into East-West mentality differences. His outsider perspective, which he shares with Schulze, who lived first for

six months in St. Petersburg, Russia then in New York in the mid-1990s, granted Loest the ability to write early in the 1990s from a calculated distance about unification's wide-reaching effects. Schulze's loosely connected, not really "simple" stories coalesce into a novel whose consciously adopted western format, imitating the American short story and disjointed film narratives like Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*, produces an ironic friction when contrasted with its purportedly provincial, Eastern German contents. The irony in *Katerfrühstück* and in *Simple Storys* arises when their characters' diverse mentalities, attitudes toward unification, and generally tragic fates are juxtaposed with their expectations for what could have been a more fruitful and enjoyable postwall German experience. Both novels' realistic contents also appear ironic when contrasted with their artificial narrative complexity.

At the opposite pole of the satirical spectrum, which ranges from the subtly ironic on the one end to the grotesque on the other, two grotesque texts by Volker Braun (*Der Wendehals* 1995) and Kerstin Hensel (*Gipsbut* 1999) constitute Chapter 4. Braun's work stands out among the other texts in this study because of its dialogic form, which harks back to his most controversial GDR work, the *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, completed in 1981, but for political reasons not published until 1985. *Gipsbut* is unique in that it blends two separate but interrelated narratives and multiple genres into a grotesque novel that bursts with fantastical characters, animals, and events. These two authors blend grotesque characters with distorted physical features, disjointed language and narrative, as well as the fantastic, to convey a pessimistic, dystopian view of post-*Wende* Germany and, in Hensel's case, also of the GDR. Of all texts featured here, Braun's and Hensel's are the most philosophically rich, commenting openly and in symbolic form on the loss of the Marxist utopian ideology and the insecure future of human civilization. Analyzing these authors' multifaceted application of the grotesque mode reveals unification's traumatic effects on Eastern German identities.

The Conclusion consolidates my findings and wraps up my assessments of the ways Eastern German satire contributes a distinctly Eastern German voice to the larger German cultural context. Elucidating commonalities and differences among the ten texts from chapters 1 through 4, I appraise how the authors' use of stereotypical and atypical characters within the framework of these novels buttresses and subverts prevailing images of East(ern) Germans. I also compare the phenomenon of humor and satire in post-unification Eastern German literature to the GDR satirical tradition and demonstrate how postwall satire reflects diverse, mostly extra-ideological notions of utopia. Regarding the position and function of Eastern German satire within the larger body of German

literature and culture at the cusp of the twenty-first century, I argue that this literary trend contributes to the discourse of criticism and identity-building following the *Wende*. Satirists flourish in times when there is nothing to laugh about, such as in the real existing socialist situation of the GDR or in the difficult times which accompany any major sociopolitical shift. The German expression "Humor ist, wenn man trotzdem lacht" articulates this essential paradox of humor's blossoming in the form of satirical critiques in hard times. Apparently, satire and humor can be used as emotional and intellectual crutches or weapons in any fight for survival.

Defining Humor and Satire

Satire and humor are two concepts that are hard to define and to distinguish, mainly because perceptions of them are very subjective. In "The Definition of Satire: A Note on Method," Robert C. Elliott writes that "real definitions of terms like *satire*, *tragedy*, the *novel* are impossible. These are what philosophers call open concepts; that is, concepts in which a set of necessary and sufficient properties by which one could define the concept, and thus close it, are lacking."²³ The openness Elliott points to as a methodological problem arises in the case of satire and humor in the realm of artistic production because both are regarded as distinct literary genres and as stylistic modes that can be used in any written, spoken, or visual text. Satire's relationship to humor/the comic is also difficult to establish.²⁴ On the one hand, satire has been categorized as a type of humor. On the other hand, satirists often use humor or other literary modes, that is, parody, the grotesque, irony, and so forth, in their satirical texts. Humor is, therefore, a frequent but not necessary component of satire. Considering that "black humor," whereby "sinister objects like death, disease, or warfare are treated with bitter amusement, usually in a manner calculated to offend and shock," is also a type of humor, one can also argue that humor itself is not always humorous or funny.²⁵ For the purposes of this study of ten novels that are simultaneously satirical and more or less humorous, I do not always adhere to strict distinctions

23 *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 11 (1962): 22. Elliott credits Morris Weitz with inventing the term "open concept" in "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15.9 (1956): 27-35.

24 Ludger Claßen, *Satirisches Erzählen im 20. Jahrhundert: Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Martin Walser, F.C. Delius* (München: Fink, 1986) 8.

25 This definition of "black humor" was taken from the listing for "black comedy" in Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1990) 24.

between the two terms. Since all texts here express serious sociopolitical critiques, I refer to them in my title and throughout this study as satires. Because all also incorporate humor to varying degrees as inseparable components to bolster these satirical critiques, their humorous approaches being significant criteria for their inclusion here, I particularly focus on the authors' use of humorous techniques as a means to convey satirical criticism. My understanding of the wide range of humor and satire definitions is provided here, beginning with the concept of humor, and they inform the textual analyses that follow.

The most fundamental definition of humor is based on the "incongruity theory" of Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, who assert that humor is produced when two juxtaposed ideas or events are perceived as incompatible.²⁶ Kant states specifically that laughter results from the sudden transformation of a tensed expectation into thin air, arguing that everything that produces laughter is somehow contradictory, or at least contrary to human reason.²⁷ Because this definition may apply to any humorous situation, a more useful way to examine it is to break it down into satirical, foolish, and sympathetic subcategories.²⁸ Satirical humor is produced when humor is directed pointedly or aggressively against an object to illustrate its flaws or to censure it in some way. Satire may serve to teach or to uplift morally. During the Enlightenment period and, once again, in the GDR, *verlachen*, a kind of satire-in-action, was supposed to serve as a form of social control, a means of punishing the object meant to raise awareness and eventually perhaps improve the

26 See Rita Bischof, "Lachen und Sein: Einige Lachtheorien im Lichte von Georges Bataille," in Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf, eds., *Lachen - Gelächter - Lächeln: Reflexionen in drei Spiegeln* (Frankfurt a.M.: Syndikat, 1986) 52-67. Laughter, by contrast, is the human physical reaction to humor, but also to "pleasure, derision, or nervousness," *Webster's College Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1995).

27 Immanuel Kant, "Kritik der Urteilskraft," *Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, vol. 5 (Wiesbaden: Insel-Verlag, 1957) 437. Kant writes: "Es muß in allem, was ein lebhaftes erschütterndes Lachen erregen soll, etwas Widersinniges sein (woran also der Verstand an sich kein Wohlgefallen finden kann). Das Lachen ist ein Affekt aus der plötzlichen Verwandlung einer gespannten Erwartung in nichts." Schopenhauer states: "Das *Lachen* entsteht jedesmal aus nichts andern, als aus der plötzlich wahrgenommenen Inkongruenz zwischen einem Begriff und den realen Objekten, die durch ihn, in irgendeiner Beziehung, gedacht worden waren, und es ist selbst eben nur der Ausdruck dieser Inkongruenz." See Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vol. 1, § 13, (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1960, repr. 1976) 104-108, 105 and vol. 2, ch. 8, "Zur Theorie des Lächerlichen," 121-135.

28 Theodor A. Meyer, *Ästhetik* (Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1925) 418-427. Meyer refers to humor as "das Komische," meaning not only that which is humorous, funny, or comical, but also the strange, absurd, or grotesque. In German the three subcategories presented here are: "satirische," "nährische," and "sympathische Komik."

reader's or spectator's behavior.²⁹ Foolish humor includes silliness, foolishness, and absurdity. Here, humor may have no deeper aspirations than to amuse and entertain. Lastly, sympathetic humor is used to demonstrate sympathy with its object. Such conciliatory humor allows the reader (or spectator) to laugh *with* the target. These distinctions prove essential to analyzing post-unification Eastern German humor in a literary context since, as the following chapters show, some authors like Brussig, Loest, or Braun wield their words as weapons to attack the specific circumstances they observe(d) and live(d), while others like Schirmer, Rosenlöcher, or Ulbrich apparently employ humor mainly to foster a feeling of community among their fellow (Eastern) Germans. As Jefferson Chase articulates: "In some sense, humorous utterances always represent unstable moments that disrupt established patterns of significance. On the other hand, humor also partakes of stability."³⁰

At the turn of the twentieth century Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud expanded on prior notions of the comic by describing laughter's function in human psychological development and in social interactions. Bergson's theory confirms the Enlightenment view of laughter as *verlachen* or a form of edification. Bergson claimed that a person laughs when he sees another person appear "mechanical" or "absent-minded" instead of "elastic," meaning fully self-aware and able to act with agility in any circumstance.³¹ Bergson perceived laughter as serving the conservative social function of censuring people's behavior (Bergson, "Laughter" 71-73). After someone has been laughed at for being clumsy, he will pay more attention to what he is doing. This notion of laughter or *verlachen* as a potential behavioral corrective is applied in quite diverse ways in Eastern German satirical texts. Authors like Schirmer and Rosenlöcher, who grant their narrators self-irony, have these narrators incite laughter at themselves and thus express this laughter less as a (self-)corrective than as a coping mechanism, also for their readers. Brussig and Hensel cleverly satirize the GDR past, encouraging readers to ridicule their exaggerated male protagonists in order to direct attention toward a particular, post-*Wende*

29 GDR scholar Peter Nelken called satire "eine Form der gesellschaftlichen Bestrafung für den Menschen," which "bei der Erziehung des Menschen von unschätzbare Bedeutung ist." See Nelken "Die Satire – Waffe der sozialistischen Erziehung: Ein Diskussionsbeitrag," *Einheit* 3 (1962): 102-113, 111.

30 Jefferson S. Chase, *Inciting Laughter: The Development of "Jewish Humor" in Nineteenth Century German Culture* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2000) 8.

31 Henri Bergson, "Laughter," from *Comedy: An Essay [by] George Meredith and Laughter [by] Henri Bergson*, ed. Wylie Sypher (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1956) 66-73. Bergson's *Le rire* was originally published in 1900 by F. Alcan in Paris.

media-hyped stereotype of the GDR ideologue.³² Although they clearly reject their ideologue protagonists, Brussig and Hensel imply that the public obsession with such types is also not a healthy psychological reaction to the *Wende*, and that similar types can also exist in western societies.

As Chase points out, Bergson's conclusions are diametrically opposed to those of Sigmund Freud, who argued that laughter functions as a source of release and pleasure for its producer and her audience. Freud analyzed language as a source of "Witz" (wit or jokes), and established its (wit's or jokes') relationship to the unconscious. He believed that the fewer inhibitions a person has, the more she should be able to enjoy humor.³³ Furthermore, a joke-teller (or humorist):

[b]y expressing psychic content otherwise in need of repression [...] is able to release his or her audience from the need for repression and therefore provide them with a moment of pleasure. The upshot of what Freud terms humor's "social procedure" (*sozialer Vorgang*) is covert individual rebellion against collective constraint, precisely the opposite of what it is for Bergson. (Chase 9)

While early Enlightenment scholars like Johann Christoph Gottsched³⁴ and the more recent Bergson propose theories of laughter as a form of social control akin to satire, Freud's theory of laughter as producing pleasure in the audience, by contrast, fits into the sympathetic category. Approximately half the narrators/protagonists in post-unification satires fall into the category of those the reader laughs *at* and half into the category with which the reader sympathizes. Nearly all negative characters possess a few sympathetic traits, however, while the positive figures are hardly morally perfect. This dichotomy suggests that Eastern German satirical approaches have moved away from the socialist realist demand for black and white distinctions between "bad" and "good" characters, the negative characters existing solely to be rejected, and the "positive heroes" to be emulated. Despite their complexities, these new characters were still

32 Examples of media hype surrounding the postwall *Stasi* debates and criminal trials can be found in *Dokumentation zum Staatssicherheitsdienst der ehemaligen DDR in 6 Teilen (I-VI). 1. November 1989 – 31. Oktober 1990*, Part I, ed. Peter Eisenfeld and Günther Buch (Berlin: Gesamtdeutsches Institut Bundesanstalt für Gesamtdeutsche Aufgaben, 1990). For an interpretation of Brussig's particular strategies in *Helden wie wir* to manipulate this media material and thereby attract public attention to his "deformed" *Stasi* protagonist Klaus Uhltscht, see Kristie Foell and Jill Twark, "Bekenntnisse des Stasi-Hochstaplers Klaus Uhltscht: Thomas Brussig's Comical and Controversial *Helden wie wir*," *German Writers and the Politics of Culture: Dealing with the Stasi*, eds. Paul Cooke and Andrew Plowman (Houndmills, Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 173-194.

33 Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten/Der Humor* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1992) 151 and 162-64.

34 Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977, orig. 1751) 643.

developed out of, and perpetuate, a series of postwall stereotypes about Eastern and Western Germans. Because of their powerful impact on identity construction, I discuss these stereotypes at great length in my individual analyses and in the Conclusion.

The Question of Utopia in Eastern German Satire

The traditional view of satire assumes that it possesses a utopian vision as counterpart to its satirical negation of real-world ills.³⁵ This utopia need not mean a perfect society, but rather the implied opposite of, or at least something different from, the satirically described circumstances.³⁶ In the late twentieth century, new insights from the interdisciplinary fields of cultural studies, feminist theory, and discourse analysis, as well as other social sciences, have expanded previous definitions of satire and humor to encompass an ever-broader range of theories. These revised, more open theoretical discussions reject earlier definitions for being too narrow or one-sided, and no longer cling to the idea that satirists always seek to better society. Satire is not just "derisive reduction and rejection," but also "inquiry and provocation, play and display, anything from Menippean fantasy to learned anatomizing."³⁷ In the 1970s an international discussion

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- 35 Claßen discusses various scholars and their perspectives on the issue of utopia in satire (8-9). He quotes Helmut Arntzen and Walter Hinck as supporting the thesis that "Satire und Utopie gehören zusammen" (Hinck 17). See Helmut Arntzen, "Deutsche Satire im 20. Jahrhundert," in Herrmann Friedemann and Otto Mann, eds., *Deutsche Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1 (Heidelberg: W. Rothe, 1961) 225 and Walter Hinck, "Einleitung. Die Komödie zwischen Satire und Utopie," *Zur Komiktheorie und zur Geschichte der europäischen Komödie*, Reinhold Grimm and Walter Hinck, eds. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1982) 7-19.
- 36 One literary topos often used in satirical works to connect satire directly to a utopian vision is the *verkehrte Welt* (world turned upside-down). In depicting a *verkehrte Welt*, satirists assert that the world could be a better place if only it were different from their critical descriptions. For a detailed discussion of the "verkehrte Welt" topos, as well as its ramifications for twentieth-century philosophy, see Claßen 9-11, as well as Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die verkehrte Welt," *Materialien zu Hegels "Phänomenologie des Geistes,"* eds. Hans Friedrich Fulda and Dieter Heinrich (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1973).
- 37 Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1994) 4. "Menippean fantasy" refers to Menippean satire, which consists of verse integrated into a prose narrative whose contents combine crude realism and fantastic imagination. The genre derives its name from the wandering Greek philosopher Menippus from Gadara, Syria, who lived in the 3rd century B.C. and composed satires of a Cynic stamp. Although his writings were lost, in the 1st century B.C. the Roman author Varro imitated them and thus perpetuated the form. The best example of it is Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, whose title is a pun on "apotheosis." Chris Baldick defines Menippean satire as "a form of intellectually humorous work characterized by miscellaneous contents, displays of curious erudition, and comical discussions on philosophical topics. [...] The humor in these works is more cheerfully intellectual and less aggressive than in those works which we would usually call

emerged in which scholars argued whether a utopia is *explicit* in satirical negation, i.e., inextricably bound to it; merely *implicit*, in other words, not openly described in the text but rather left open for the reader/spectator to interpret on an individual level; or *nonexistent* (Claßen 9). Depending on each particular case, any of the three perspectives—the explicit, the implicit, and the nonexistent—are possible in a text. Moreover, a utopia must not be implied in satire: "If satire is inquiry and provocation, it bears directly on our real moral beliefs; insofar as it is display or play, perhaps it does not touch our everyday lives" (Griffin 13). Interpreting a statement made by Kenneth Burke that satire thrives in repressive political systems and "becomes arbitrary and effete" in free, democratic societies, Dustin Griffin states that under these freer circumstances, "the satirist is not so much a dedicated guerilla intent on overthrowing injustice as he is an impudent and daring mocker [...], seeing how much he can get away with but not really believing that authority will be shaken" (140). When satire is reduced to a form of entertainment, it ceases to communicate a striving for higher ideals, despite its aggressive stance. Griffin's central argument, in fact, is that satire's ambiguity may sometimes render the detection of concrete ideals or utopias impossible.

The following excerpt from my interview with Thomas Rosenlöcher ten years after the *Wende* exemplifies the struggle Eastern German authors had following unification, not only with imparting utopian ideals in their works, but also with the concept of utopia itself, which they realized even before unification to be an unachievable goal:

Twark: Direkt vor der Wende haben Sie sich in den *Verkauften Pflastersteinen* beschwert: "Dieser fortlaufende Landeskummer macht provinziell. Das immergleiche Gejammer über Unfreundlichkeit und Verfall macht utopie- also kunstunfähig." Mir scheint dieser Satz immer noch aktuell. Würden Sie dies auch noch heute für gültig erklären?

Rosenlöcher: Das ist kompliziert. Es verblüfft mich, wenn ich das heute wieder höre. Nur wer Utopien hat, kann Kunst machen, habe ich damals gemeint. Das meine ich gar nicht mehr ganz so. Ich bin schon wieder weit ein Schritt zurückgegangen, das merke ich gerade. Für mich war das damals eine Voraussetzung, dass ich eine andere Gesellschaft will, dann kann ich schreiben. Das meine ich immer noch ein bisschen. Aber es ist nicht mehr so eine unbedingte Voraussetzung für die Kunst [...].

Twark: Es gibt aber auch Künstler, die völlig ohne Utopie schreiben.

Rosenlöcher: Für mich war das damals [in der DDR] ein absolutes Muss. Das war so. Das hängt damit zusammen, dass wir in dem Moment eine Verheißung zu tun hatten damit, mit Utopieversprechen, und da lebte man ja immer das

satires, although it holds up contemporary intellectual life to gentle ridicule" (*Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 132). Despite the Greek origins of Menippean satire, the Romans claim satire as we know it today to have been their invention. Quintilian once stated: "Satura quidem tota nostra est."

Gegenteil. Und dass man so damit konfrontiert wird, dass man das eigentlich will, was gesagt wird. Für mich war dann Utopie einfach, dass ich etwas anderes will. Und ich denke heute, wenn es mir völlig verloren ginge, dann würde ich schon ärmer sein. Und ich mag mich auch dafür, dass ich das wollte und dachte. Aber nun werde ich älter, und ich sehe schon, dass man, wenn man genau hinschaut, etwas von der eigenen Existenz 'reinzufangen, ist auch schon sehr viel.

Twark: Was für Utopien haben Sie noch?

Rosenlöcher: Das lässt sich nicht mehr so sagen.

Twark: Einfach Freundschaft oder das Miteinander, zum Beispiel?

Rosenlöcher: Ich meine immer noch, zum Beispiel, dass das Überleben der Menschheit eine schöne Utopie ist. Und dass das eigentlich ein überschreitendes Handeln erfordern würde. Und nicht das angepasste Handeln zu machen, was sich gerade so anbietet, was opportun ist, sondern schon das überschreitende Handeln. Nicht, dass wir eine tolle Gesellschaft bekommen, sondern dass wir überhaupt überleben. Das ist insofern für mich nicht weg, denn ich denke für mich immer noch, dass es Leute geben muss, die dieses überschreitende Handeln einfordern. Und wenn das völlig verschwindet, sind wir dann wirklich verloren. Wenn wir nicht mal das Geringste machen. Aber der Glauben an die große Gesellschaft der Gerechtigkeit, der ist weg. Trotzdem habe ich damals auch gedacht, diese Gesellschaft gibt es nicht, aber ich habe nur gedacht, dass man sie trotzdem wollen sollte. (Appendix 3, 345)

Rosenlöcher's adherence to a utopian ideal in his works, albeit an ideal that has shifted from its focus on the specific socialist project in the GDR to that of a less ideologically narrow, global humanist utopia, which he verbalized only after being pressed in this interview, resembles the views other Eastern German authors have expressed. When Bernd Schirmer was asked about his utopian motives in the 1994 novel *Cahlenberg*, which depicts the unsuccessful attempt of a group of citizens to establish a small-scale commune in an isolated region of the GDR, Schirmer stated succinctly, "[a]uch wenn eine Utopie scheitert, hören Utopien und das Bedürfnis nach ihnen nicht auf" (Appendix 1, 318). Matthias Biskupek, taking the question more personally, describes his utopian vision as "[d]ie Suche nach mehr Harmonie, nach Freundlichkeit. Ich will eigentlich, daß die Leute freundlich miteinander sind" (Appendix 2, 336). In regards to his novel *Der Quotensachse*, however, he provides a quite different perspective:

In dem *Quotensachsen*, denke ich schon, steckt eine Utopie. Wenn zum Schluß alle Leute aufstehen und das Leben, was er bis dahin erzählt hat, der gute Mario Claudius Zwintcher, auf einmal ganz anders erzählt, steht schon der Wunsch dahinter, daß das, was wir erlebt haben, vielleicht doch anders sein könnte. Ich glaube schon, das ist eine Utopie. (Appendix 2, 336)

Here it is interesting to observe how Biskupek applies the word "Utopie" to what others might call "Ostalgie." He proposes that by taking a more positive view of their pasts, Eastern Germans can improve the quality of their lives in the present.

While these and other Eastern German authors may no longer strive to better society as a whole in the context of a sweeping, utopian project, all the literary satires treated here explicitly or implicitly critique social injustices or individual failings and thus impart humanist ideals. These ideals resemble Rosenlöcher's goal of human survival despite adversity, social turmoil, or environmental destruction, and can be concretized by researching the writings of philosophers and poets to whom the authors directly and indirectly allude in their texts. Where they can be detected, indirect allusions to utopian ideals often take the form of fantastical symbols or characters who themselves embody survival or social change. Klaus Ultzsch's impossibly enlarged penis becomes a confidence-inspiring, symbolic weapon that enables him to open the Berlin Wall in Brussig's *Helden wie wir*, and the ejaculatory, apocalyptic volcanic eruption in Hensel's *Gipsbut* represents the symbolic cleansing and renewing of what Hensel sees as a morally suspect unified Germany. More explicit allusions to utopian philosophies can be found in the form of intertextual references that range from verbatim quotes to stylistic parodies.

Because satirical literature in the GDR was perceived to be a highly serious form of art, bearing the responsibility of raising citizens' socialist consciousness, most GDR satirists, even those opposed to the stagnant regime, used satire attempting to further an idealized, socialist cause. Because of this fact, one valuable question to pose in an analysis of Eastern German literature in a post-unification context is whether or not this new literature perpetuates the highly prescriptive GDR satirical tradition with its more or less explicit satirical negation.³⁸ In post-*Wende* Eastern German texts, satire is both playfully mocking *and* destructive; it conveys resignation alongside hope for a better world. In interpreting these texts, my approach is to consider each individually, elucidating the strategies of humor and satire which allow for the most accurate interpretation of *how* and *to what purposes* each author adopts these modes.

Although it is crucial to understand these ten satirical texts in their sociohistorical context, providing a separate, detailed history of the events surrounding German unification here would be superfluous, because innumerable scholarly books and articles on this subject already exist.³⁹ Consequently, the research, analyses, and conclusions here focus on the way these events have been depicted in a fictional frame. Since the texts do address a broad panorama of experiences emerging from the GDR

38 Though satirists openly opposed to the GDR regime were forced to camouflage their satirical critiques in order to get their texts past censors, since most of these satirists' readers saw through this camouflage without difficulty, most GDR satire was actually of the explicit kind.

39 See section 2.4, "Postwar and Postwall German History," in the bibliography.

and/or postwall societal transformations in Eastern Germany, however, I have provided historical explanations regarding the GDR or post-1989 Germany where necessary to enhance the understanding of each text.

Irony, Parody, the Grotesque, and the Absurd

Along with puns and other wordplays, exaggeration, typical characters, and stereotypes, satirists often rely on the rhetorical devices of irony, parody, the grotesque, the absurd, and scatology. Irony is produced when the intended meaning of a statement is concealed or contradicted by the literal meaning of the words. Linda Hutcheon calls irony both semantic and evaluative, distinguishing two agents in the making of irony, the *ironist*, who "transmits both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly presented, and the *interpreter*, who infers **"meaning"** in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an **attitude** toward both the said and the unsaid."⁴⁰ Like satire, irony is a central device for constituting distinctive levels of complexity and ambiguity. Irony can also foster a sense of community among groups of people who "get the joke." When irony becomes so ambiguous as to be open to virtually limitless interpretations, it becomes what Wayne C. Booth calls "unstable irony."⁴¹ Most irony in Eastern German texts is stable and thus will be recognized easily by anyone who has lived in East(ern) Germany. Even those well versed in GDR and unification history may not catch all hidden meanings, attitudes, or intertextual references, however. Those readers unfamiliar with the GDR or unification's effects, of course, will only be able to recognize and comprehend this irony if it is pointed out and interpreted. For this reason, I aim my interpretations toward all readers, whether they are familiar with East(ern) German society or not.

Hutcheon is also helpful in the search for an applicable definition of parody, a device whereby an author mimics the style of another literary work, exaggerating it in order to mock the stylistic habits of a targeted author or school of theory.⁴² Her definition allows not only for textual reproductions that intend to produce "ridiculing laughter," but also for "imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (Hutcheon, *Parody* 6). Most relevant to Eastern German

40 *Irony's Edge* (London: Routledge, 1995) 11. Italics and bolding are Hutcheon's.

41 *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1974) 240-241. Booth classifies all kinds of irony, dividing it into "dramatic," "stable," and "unstable" forms, and breaking "stable" and "unstable" into "overt," "covert," "local," and "infinite" (see chart p. 245 with definitions).

42 *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 2nd ed. (New York: Methuen, 1986). The concise definition of parody here can be found in Baldick, 161-162.

texts is Hutcheon's recognition that parody can be a means for an author to come to terms with his or her cultural past while maintaining a tangible connection to this past. Such artists' "double-voiced parodic forms play on the tensions created by this historical awareness. They signal less an acknowledgement of the 'inadequacy of the definable forms' of their predecessors (Martin 1980, 666) than their own desire to 'refunction' those forms to their own needs" (Hutcheon, *Parody* 4). Although Hutcheon's definition of parody appears to be incompatible with satire as a literary mode that focuses on contemporaneous events, one must distinguish between the *form* and the *content* of a text. Authors can imitate an earlier textual *structure*, for example, an archaic genre like the chivalric romance, and update the text's *content* to comment on a contemporary occurrence. Cervantes's *Don Quixote* is perhaps the most famous example of this practice. In referring to past authors by parodying their works, authors can expand the meaning of their more topical texts by emphasizing the circularity or repetitiveness of history. Thomas Rosenlöcher and Volker Braun parody previous literary models in this way to comment on post-*Wende* Germany. Rosenlöcher overwrites both Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's late eighteenth-century Harz mountain poem and Heinrich Heine's from the early nineteenth century in order to highlight the perpetual political and mental divisions in Germany. Braun draws on Cervantes's *Don Quixote* to emphasize the paradoxical, backward views of his opportunist figure, along with the fruitlessness of this figure's eternal quest for "experience." Neither author parodies the *style* of his forebear in order to mock him⁴³; both call the reader's attention to these forebears' earlier works in order to broaden the scope of the commentary in their own texts and enable a coming-to-terms with the present.

Three further devices satirists frequently deploy are the grotesque, the absurd, and the scatological (referring specifically to bodily functions and fluids). These devices are integrated into a text to produce similar effects: to shock, disgust, or amuse the reader with a distorted view of reality or a hyper-realistic one. The grotesque is characterized by fantastical distortion or extreme exaggeration, and may appear sinister when physical objects blend with live creatures⁴⁴ as in a Hieronymus Bosch or Salvador Dali painting. The absurd, by comparison, may use discontinuities of speech or action to highlight the general senselessness of life, a condition which

43 Although Rosenlöcher attacks Goethe for being a conservative, bourgeois author, it is not Goethe's writing style that he mocks, but rather his political views, which he equates with those of a Western German Mercedes driver and *Apotheker*. See my treatment of Rosenlöcher's *Harzreise* in Chapter 1 for further elaboration of this metaphor.

44 Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966, orig. German edition 1957) 21.

human agency cannot change. While scholars generally draw a line between the grotesque and the absurd, asserting that the literary grotesque is applied to criticize societal failings, and that the absurd emphasizes the senselessness and incorrigible state of human existence, this is not always the case.⁴⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, in his analysis of Rabelais's use of the grotesque in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, concludes that it is "inadmissible to reduce to mere satire the entire substance of the grotesque image."⁴⁶ Central to his argument is that the "satirical exaggeration of the negative" can only account for the quantitative, but not the qualitative aspects of any grotesque depiction. In Rabelais's and other authors' grotesque images of the body there exist both positive and negative interpretive possibilities. While the images themselves may, on the surface, appear ugly, horrific, or disgusting, in uniting the human body with physical objects belonging to the external world, Bakhtin avers, they can "uncrown" powerful institutions such as the Church and thereby "renew" them, restoring the lost duality of human beings and the world (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 312, 324-5). And in *Language as Aggression: Studies in the Postwar Drama* Linda M. Hill counters the standard definition of the absurd as senseless or futile by arguing that the absurd can express satirical critiques.⁴⁷ Most applicable to Volker Braun's *Wendehals* and Kerstin Hensel's *Gipsbut*, however, is Lyn Marven's argument that Eastern Bloc citizens experienced both mental and physical trauma under socialism, which can erupt in their texts in the form of out-of-control bodies, disjointed language, and/or stories that break conventional narrative laws.⁴⁸ While many Eastern German satirists spice up their texts with grotesque and scatological images to revel in their new, post-unification freedom and to entertain their readers, Braun and Hensel use the grotesque mode pointedly to reflect the trauma inscribed on their protagonists' bodies before and during the unification process.⁴⁹

45 See Lee Byron Jennings, "The Ludicrous Demon: Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post-Romantic Prose," *Modern Philology* 71 (1963): 1-214, 9. In *Das Groteske und das Absurde im modernen Theater* Arnold Heidsieck summarizes Jennings's definition thus: "Nicht eine Laune der Natur gilt uns grotesk, sondern solche Entstellung, die das Schreckliche und Lächerliche auf die Spitze, zum unerträglichen Widerspruch treibt: die produzierte Entstellung des Menschen, die von Menschen verübte Unmenschlichkeit" (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969) 17. Martin Esslin's standard definition of the absurd can be found in *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 2001) 425.

46 *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 307.

47 Bonn: Bouvier, 1976, 11. For more on Hill's argument, see the section in Chapter 4 entitled "Schaber's Grotesque and Absurd Traumatized Body" on Volker Braun's *Der Wendehals*.

48 *Body and Narrative in Contemporary Literatures in German* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 2005) 10, 26-27.

49 Thomas Brussig inscribes his protagonist's traumatic GDR experiences on his body in a similar, grotesque manner in *Helden wie wir*. I treat his novel separately, however, because it belongs more broadly within the picaresque tradition, which often relies on the grotesque.

Although some German authors have treated the GDR or unification with means that can be interpreted best by applying Bakhtin's concept of the "carnavalesque,"⁵⁰ I reject this theory as an overarching theme in the present analyses. The "carnavalesque" implies a group or collective experience, described as "folk merriment" or "feasts," and all the texts in this study depict a first-person narrator or protagonists who, though they may speak of or experience group interaction, always dominate the narrative point-of-view. These figures do not give the impression that their life experiences as a whole are group ones as Bakhtin describes them (*Rabelais* 218-9). The euphoria expressed at the time the Berlin Wall was opened comes closer in my view to a true carnivalesque event. These texts focus either on the sobering times after this euphoria had passed or on life in the GDR—which perhaps had its carnivalesque moments during mass cultural events like rock concerts or parades—but in general was a rigidly hierarchical regime.

While the above definitions apply to my general use of the terms humor, satire, irony, and so forth, additional theoretical concepts are integrated into each chapter where pertinent; for example, the picaresque is defined in Chapter 2 as a prelude to my explication of the three picaresque texts.⁵¹ Examining commonalities and differences among a wide range of Eastern German texts, I tie together immediate fictional reactions to the turbulent historical events of 1989 and the early 1990s in order to provide an in-depth overview of this contemporary literary trend. In what follows, I demonstrate how ten representative novels, as well as humor and satire more generally, are symptomatic literary responses to the *Wende*. By contributing to the wider German discourse of criticism, they assisted Eastern Germans to develop a strong sense of identity within and yet apart from the broader German context.

50 Markus Symmank assesses the functions of the carnivalesque in late twentieth-century texts by Wolfgang Hilbig, Stephan Krawczyk, Katja Lange-Müller, Ingo Schulze, and Stefan Schütz. Regarding Schulze's *Simple Stories*, he concludes that it appears only "in geringerem Maße und eher verstreut als noch in dem Erzählungsband 33 *Augenblicke des Glücks*" and that it is confined to the first two of its 29 chapters (*Karnevaleske Konfigurationen in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002, 73).

51 For further reference see section 6, "General Secondary Literature on Satire and Related Modes" in the bibliography.

Chapter 1

The Comic Survivor: Self-Irony and Defensiveness in the Post-*Wende* Transition

Thomas Rosenlöcher's *Die Wiederentdeckung des Gebens beim Wandern. Harzreise*, Bernd Schirmer's *Schlehwins Giraffe*, and Jens Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*

Consider how life would change if your home country suddenly disappeared. What if your job became obsolete overnight and all the consumer products you buy were suddenly replaced with new ones? Would you have the courage to adopt a giraffe from a bankrupt zoo? The protagonists in Thomas Rosenlöcher's *Die Wiederentdeckung des Gebens beim Wandern. Harzreise*, Bernd Schirmer's *Schlehwins Giraffe*, and Jens Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* all undergo trials like these. Each narrator's experiences indicate the types of difficulties East Germans had in adjusting to the fall of the Berlin Wall. One main cause of these hardships was the clash of East and West German cultures, made more abrasive by the fact that West Germany dominated the unification process. Up to this point, the Federal Republic had not only been a foreign country, but also an ideological archenemy. Forcing these two groups with extremely different socialized behaviors and ideologies to interact closely was bound to produce friction and incongruity. These unavoidable conflicts lend themselves to humorous jests and aggressive satirical barbs of the kind Rosenlöcher, Schirmer, and Sparschuh display in having their narrators attempt to cope with and to strike back at what appears to them to be new and obscure Western power structures that are quickly replacing old, familiar ones. Because these texts were composed so soon after the wall fell (1990-1995), the humorous and satirical strategies the authors employ to depict their protagonists' experiences do not reflect a sovereign mastery of the subject as, for example, Günter Grass (*Die Blechtrommel* 1959) or Edgar Hilsenrath (*Der Nazi und der Friseur* 1971) do in their World War II satires; rather, they convey a stupefaction or helplessness as to how to convey unification experiences in words. Thus their approach often appears more defensive than aggressive. Like

Cervantes's epigonal figure Don Quixote, their protagonists experience a world that appears to have been turned upside down, and their actions, thoughts, and speech appear anachronistic, occasionally paranoid—definitely comical. Whereas a healthy dose of self-irony helps Rosenlöcher's and Schirmer's protagonists maintain their optimism and eventually come to terms with the altered circumstances, Sparschuh's narrator, taking his new sales profession too seriously, gradually loses touch with reality and in the end faces a bleak, uncertain future. Despite their differences, the three narrators resemble each other in their bumbling fashion of dealing with unification's effects, their condemnatory attitudes toward Western German treatment of Eastern Germans, and their ironic, self-conscious perspective on the GDR.

Engaging comical, forty-something male narrators who struggle to adapt to recent changes, Rosenlöcher, Schirmer, and Sparschuh supply a distinct, fictional lens through which unification is viewed. Tanja Nause refers to their particular, first-person narrative perspective as "inszenierte Naivität" or the "naïve gaze," a technique that simplifies or reduces real-life complexities, produces alienation (*Verfremdung*) because of this distortion, and, like epic humor, sets up a contrast between the narrated story and how it is narrated (as well as a perspectival difference between the text and the reader) (Nause, *Inszenierung* 32-33). She emphasizes that this technique serves as a means of social criticism, having its origins in a common experience of loss and the need to respond to this loss critically (12-13). With regard to narrators like those here, however, I choose to focus on the particular coping strategies of self-irony (viewing one's fate as inherently ironic or humorous, or inciting laughter at or with oneself) and of defensive rhetoric as critical and identity-building mechanisms. The immediate postwall time and space in which these narrators live is what anthropologists Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner call "liminal"; that is, "betwixt and between successive lodgments in jural political systems."¹ Turner illustrates the creative, restructuring potential of this state:

[T]he possibility exists [in the liminal] of standing aside not only from one's own social position but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements. [...] Without liminality, program might indeed determine performance. But given liminality, prestigious programs can be undermined and multiple alternative programs may be generated. (Turner, *Dramas* 14-5)

1 Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1974) 13. Van Gennep coined the term "liminal" (Latin for "threshold") in 1909 to refer to the second of three life stages in *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960). Applied initially only to transitions in primitive, tribal relations, as the term gained currency, coming to designate any rite of passage from one social state and status to another, Turner recognized its potential for literary production and criticism (*Dramas* 14-5).

Within their collective liminal space before Western structures solidified in the East, Rosenlöcher, Schirmer, and Sparschuh fashioned narrators who pass between cultures and societies, deconstructing past and present, East and West, the personal and the political. From this liminal vantage point, acutely perceived because they have lost the professions on which they had formerly constructed their identities (Rosenlöcher's narrator suffers from writer's block, Schirmer's is unemployed, and Sparschuh's, also initially unemployed, fails to gain satisfaction from his new job), these protagonists ponder the meaning of their past and present lives and construct new realities for themselves by generating and calling attention to a new, post-*Wende* language. This language consists of wordplays, word menageries, neologisms, and figures of speech. After figuratively tearing their world apart, they conclude that utopia is not found in any particular societal structure, but rather is based on the ability to express creativity and to achieve success or failure in interpersonal relationships.

Explicating these texts in their historical context, I demonstrate how each author brandishes humor, satire, and self-irony as narrative strategies in the battle to assert an Eastern German identity in the face of circumstances which threaten to erode not only the narrator's former way of life, but also his self-esteem and any positive memories of the GDR. In this chapter, as in the following three, I first treat each text separately in chronological order—here and in Chapter 2 also in decreasing order of complexity—focusing on the humorous and satirical techniques each author deploys. Drawing connections between the texts, I show how the authors utilize diverse aesthetic means to accomplish similar political ends.

Thomas Rosenlöcher's *Die Wiederentdeckung des Gehens beim Wandern. Harzreise*

In Rosenlöcher's twentieth-century *Harzreise* the narrator, an unnamed author from Dresden, takes a three-day hike in July 1990 through the Harz Mountains from the East German town of Quedlinburg to the West German Goslar "um wenigstens andeutungsweise wieder Gedichte schreiben zu können" (9).² In many ways analogous to a religious pilgrimage, this journey affords the narrator a chance to observe and

2 Parts of this chapter were excerpted from Twark, "'Ko...Ko...Kononialismus,' said the giraffe: Humorous and Satirical Responses to German Unification," in *Textual Responses to German Unification: Processing Historical and Social Change in Literature and Film*, ed. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, Rachel J. Halverson, and Kristie A. Foell (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001) 151-169. Because Rosenlöcher's narrative takes place after the *Wende* but before official unification, I refer to each part of Germany here as "East" and "West."

experience first-hand the differences between East and West Germany, to reconfigure his identity in his liminal environment, and thereby to relight his creative fire so that he can write poetry again. The first part of the title refers to the narrator's wish to rediscover walking by taking a hike, as well as his need to get used to a new culture by moving within it. His departure and arrival dates fatefully coincide with historical events that symbolically connect his experiences with Germany as a nation and point toward his journey as a quest to redefine his identity. He departs from his home in Dresden by train to Quedlinburg on July 1, 1990, the day the West and East German currency union took place, and arrives in Goslar on the third of July, the day the West German national soccer team wins the World Cup. With the second part of the title, "Harzreise," Rosenlöcher connects his late twentieth-century travelogue of a journey over the Harz Mountains with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem "Harzreise im Winter," based on a trip he took in Winter 1777 from Weimar to Goslar, and Heinrich Heine's famous travelogue, *Die Harzreise* (1826), documenting a hike Heine took in Autumn 1824 from Göttingen to Weimar and Jena.³ Rosenlöcher consciously selects Goethe's and Heine's texts to overwrite and thus, in imitating them, to parody, as a way to find meaning, truth, and a sense of continuity within an unstable time. In the GDR, Goethe and Heine had been accorded a prominent position as representatives of the humanistic, German cultural heritage (*das kulturelle Erbe*), and thus GDR writers and readers were versed in recognizing allusions to their works. Canonical authors like Goethe and Heine influenced several GDR authors such as Erwin Strittmatter and Günter de Bruyn to produce a specific brand of GDR *Heimatliteratur*. Like these authors before him, Rosenlöcher expects his readers to catch his allusions.

Following in Goethe and Heine's footsteps, Rosenlöcher describes a journey to the Harz Mountains as providing a rare opportunity for his wanderer to contemplate the beauty of nature and to reflect on a past and present life, as well as future plans. While Heine's travelogue also attacks the author's Göttingen university professors for their philistinism and pedantry, and other Germans in general for their hypocrisy, self-satisfaction, and overt nationalism, Rosenlöcher specifically targets capitalist marketing strategies, bourgeois consumerism, political

3 See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Harzreise im Winter," *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*, vol. 2.1, ed. Hartmut Reinhardt (München: Hanser, 1987) 37-41, 41 and Heinrich Heine, *Die Harzreise*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5, ed. Hans Kaufmann (München: Kindler, 1964) 13. For further comparisons of Rosenlöcher's *Harzreise* with Heine's and Goethe's works see Wilfried Grauert, "Harzreise im Sommer (mit Heine im Herzen) oder Auf der Suche nach einer neuen (Autor-) Identität" in *Weimarer Beiträge* 1 (1994): 103-118 and Irene Schülert, "Goethe, Heine und...Rosenlöcher: Die Harzreise, durch die Mühen der Berge, beschrieben von Thomas Rosenlöcher," *die tageszeitung* 25 July 1992, 16.

conservatism, and post-industrial environmental destruction. The idyllic picture Heine paints of the Harz Mountains in the early nineteenth century contrasts blatantly with Rosenlöcher's wanderer's tortuous journey. Plagued by the noise and exhaust of automobiles whenever he is forced to walk along the road, he is perpetually indignant. The cars are "vorüberrollende Mörder" and "giftige Hütten," which come "in endloser Reihe gefahren, um auch noch den letzten Fußgänger auszurotten" (57). The footpath he walks on becomes "[d]ie Fußgängerverteidigungslinie" (59).⁴ The people he meets also treat him rudely, not respecting him because of his shabby appearance and awkward behavior. After suffering through several trials on his hike, Rosenlöcher begins to attack Goethe's conservatism and to defend Marx's utopian, humanist ideals, aligning himself politically with Heine. In repeating Goethe's name throughout the text and completely avoiding Heine's, Rosenlöcher also makes Goethe into an object of satire, appearing to treat Heine with more respect. Not just politically, but also to some extent thematically and stylistically, his text picks up where Heine's left off nearly two centuries earlier. Like Heine, Rosenlöcher calls his text a "Fragment": "Du kannst machen, was du willst, die Harzreise bleibt Fragment" (88).

Although Rosenlöcher's political situation is more turbulent than Heine's was in the 1820s, and his language is denser and more playful, some of the humorous and satirical strategies the two authors employ to attack societal structures and individuals are similar. Both produce humor by displaying an ironic superiority in their descriptions of people they find distasteful or annoying. They expose as ridiculous those who try too hard to be someone they are not, those who fit too well into a stereotype, or those obsessed with any *idée fixe*.⁵ A further technique the two authors share is their ability to turn phrases so cleverly that the illogical, absurdly comical results of their efforts appear to make sense.⁶ Such ridiculous

4 Using this military metaphor Rosenlöcher defends his narrator's position with a boundary that invokes the recently eliminated GDR border. Rosenlöcher highlights the alienation produced by industrialization with metaphors that invoke Karl Marx's arguments. The "endless rows" of cars he describes, for example, resemble commodities on an assembly line and indicate an inability to approach, or have direct contact with, other human beings.

5 Heine describes a young merchant he meets in Klaustal thus: "Er sah aus wie ein Affe, der eine rote Jacke angezogen hat und nun zu sich selber sagt: Kleider machen Leute" (Heine, *Harzreise* 24). In Treseburg Rosenlöcher observes: "Als ich aus dem Wald heraustrat, sah mir der Tankwart entgegen, als tränke er täglich Benzin. Der Ort hieß Treseburg, an einigen Ferienheimen stand plötzlich "Gepflegte Speisen" geschrieben. Und selbst der Heimleiter versuchte, sein graues Waffenkammergesicht in menschlichere Falten zu legen und 'Bitte schön' zu sagen" (46).

6 In response to an ignorant Goslar burgher who insists that everything in the natural world is purposeful and useful and who claims that the trees are green because green is good for the eyes, Heine responds: "Ich gab ihm recht und fügte hinzu, daß Gott das Rindvieh

turns of phrase are also a narrative tactic they invoke to wink slyly at their readers, letting them in on the joke and thus including them in the community of those "in the know." Sensing their political powerlessness they manipulate language as a means to assert their linguistic power, despite its merely figurative or aesthetic effects.

Where the two wanderers differ is in the flexibility with which they approach each new encounter. While Heine "sich mit einer Mobilität ohnegleichen durch eine Vielzahl von Rollen und Tonlagen bewegt, ohne sich je auf eine einzelne von ihnen fixieren zu lassen," Rosenlöcher's traveler maintains the same, dubious, ironic, and (self-)castigating tone throughout his text.⁷ Only at the very end does he regain his optimism—despite prior biting critiques of West German behavior and attitudes—welcoming unification for bringing greater freedom and higher quality consumer goods.

One significant contrast between Rosenlöcher's text and Goethe's and Heine's is the fact that Rosenlöcher's wanderer is much older than Goethe and Heine were when they made their journeys. In winter 1777 Goethe was 27 years old, and in fall 1824 Heine was 26. Rosenlöcher's wanderer is "schon [...] über vierzig und vor lauter Aufstehn und Schlafengehn um den Bart herum ein wenig grau geworden" (9). His age makes it difficult for him to undertake his hike not only because of his poor physical condition, but also because of the prejudice he expects other people to have against an adult who suddenly heads off to the woods: "Überhaupt hatte es etwas Seltsames, wenn ein erwachsener Mensch plötzlich in den Wald wollte" (9). His age, an additional hurdle in his quest to traverse the mountains on foot, contributes to the comedy of trials he must endure.

Rosenlöcher alludes to these two earlier texts to add layers of meaning from the past to his own, more recent text, parodying them in order to

erschaffen, weil Fleischsuppen den Menschen stärken, daß er die Esel erschaffen, damit sie den Menschen zu Vergleichen dienen können, und daß er den Menschen selbst erschaffen, damit er Fleischsuppen essen und kein Esel sein soll." Of course, the burgher finds Heine clever and is "entzückt, einen Gleichgesinnten gefunden zu haben," not realizing that Heine has just made a fool of him (Heine, *Harzreise* 39). Similarly, Rosenlöcher pokes fun at the eighteenth-century German poet Klopstock for being pretentious about his poetry and for having written the *Messias*, "ein gänzlich unlesbares, aber bedeutendes Werk" (19). Through this Klopstock insult, Rosenlöcher exacts revenge on pretentious people who claim to read unreadable works of literature just to appear well-read: "Nur das, was keiner liest, loben alle, weil keiner zugeben darf, daß das, was alle loben, keiner gelesen hat. Wo aber keiner liest, kann der, der auch nicht liest, nur das Unlesbare noch gründlich gelesen haben" (19). With such witty formulations both authors demonstrate their verbal superiority over their adversaries—a traditional satirical tactic to deflate one's opponents.

7 Norbert Altenhofer, *Harzreise in die Zeit. Zum Funktionszusammenhang von Traum, Witz und Zensur in Heines früherer Prosa* (Düsseldorf: Heinrich Heine-Gesellschaft, 1972) 8.

demonstrate how "change entails continuity" and to offer "a model for the process of transfer and reorganization of that past."⁸ By referring to both Goethe and Heine, Rosenlöcher highlights the perpetual political and mental divisions within Germany. At the time Goethe wrote his "Harzreise," Germany was divided into nearly 300 distinct principalities. By the time Heine wrote his *Harzreise*, Napoleon had reduced these divisions to thirty, but the first unification of Germany did not occur until 1871.⁹ Rosenlöcher demonstrates that even though the 1945 division of Germany into two parts has now been overcome, psychological and cultural divisions remain. Placing his text within this previous "Harzreise" tradition, Rosenlöcher implies that his own text is simultaneously serious and satirical, apolitical and political.

Probing Rosenlöcher's text within the context of its postwall, pre-unification setting, in the following sections I demonstrate how Rosenlöcher uses humor and satire to highlight the difficulties his traveler and other East Germans have in adapting to the transition from "socialism" to "capitalism." In the second section I discuss the man's hike as a mock spiritual pilgrimage to reconfigure his identity. The third section features an analysis of the fictional author's self-defensive strategies, including metaphors and metonymies, that oppose West German accusations of East German laziness and earlier complicity with an oppressive dictatorship. The preceding themes recur in his dreams, also interpreted below, which serve as windows to his feelings toward his post-*Wende* context and toward the wife he leaves at home. The final section treats his ambivalent relationship to the GDR, which fluctuates from wistful nostalgia, to harsh condemnation, to a jubilant embracing of West German freedoms and commodities.

The Hapless Wanderer as East German Anachronism

The wanderer's comical, liminal state is reflected most overtly in his clumsy behavior. Throughout his journey it is not just his age but also his inexperience with the conventions of free market societies and the fact that he is walking and not driving a car that lead him to view and to depict

8 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 2nd ed. (New York: Methuen, 1986) 4.

9 Heine writes of a mock political debate with a patriotic young man from Greifswald in the inn on top of the Brocken mountain: "Er war der Meinung, Deutschland müsse in dreiunddreißig Gauen geteilt werden. Ich hingegen behauptete, es müssten achtundvierzig sein, weil man alsdann ein systematischeres Handbuch über Deutschland schreiben könne und es doch notwendig sei, das Leben mit der Wissenschaft zu verbinden" (*Harzreise* 58).

himself as an anachronism. His absent-mindedness, lack of coordination, and shabby appearance—long, shaggy hair and beard, unfashionable clothing—also identify him as an East German and produce a comic effect. At the hotel where he spends the first night, he has serious trouble ordering a beer because the selection is so broad and all varieties are new to him. The ungainly East German waitress does not ease the process:

Unten in der Halle versuchte das Bedienungsmädchen, die sogenannte Marktwirtschaft gleich auf mich anzuwenden, indem sie, kaum daß ich mich hingesetzt hatte, donnernd auf mich zutrat und ernstlich zu lächeln versuchte. Nur war ihr Gesicht etwas grob und nur mehr von innen her schön, das heißt recht ungeeignet, jenes auf ihrer unreinen Haut auszutragen. [...] Dennoch begann sie, mir tapfer die neuen Biersorten herzuerzählen, wodurch es uns freilich erst recht nicht gelang, gemeinsam ein Bier zu bestellen.

"Welches?"

"Wie bitte?"

"Was?"

"Ach," sagte ich, "irgendeins."

"Ja, das wird auch gern getrunken."

Ratlos sahn wir uns an.

"Bitte ein Bier", sagte ich.

"Gern", sagte sie und trat mit gleichsam befreitem Getrappel in Richtung Theke ab, um nach einer Kehrtwende nochmals nach der gewünschten Sorte zu fragen und schließlich doch noch das falsche zu bringen, das sie mir beinah zärtlich über die Hosen goß. (29)

This scene is comical because the traveler's interpretation of the new "Marktwirtschaft" as being physically manifested in the positive attention and attractive smile of a waitress conflicts blatantly with this particular waitress's ugly face and lack of finesse. As an East German, she has similar difficulties as he in living up to the new economic system's expectations. Since her difficulties have as much to do with her appearance and inexperience as his, her figure evokes humor mixed with empathy rather than derision. The pair's resulting conversation—the otherwise simple ritual of ordering a beer—is also rendered unnecessarily complicated and thus comical by their inability to communicate properly. With scenes like this Rosenlöcher produces a vaudeville or cabaret style of comedy similar to that of Charlie Chaplin or the Marx Brothers.

The fact that the hiker generally receives rude reactions from nearly everyone he encounters adds to his comical misery. Trying to pay for a meal at a *Ferienheim* on his second day, he accidentally pulls out an obsolete GDR hundred-mark bill depicting Karl Marx's long-haired, bearded image and is ridiculed by the East German recipients: "Schaut euch das an. Der Karl Marx hier will mir einen Karl-Marx andrehn!" (64). A further comical side of his character is his socialized paranoia in situations associated with the recently lifted, repressive police and military

controls in the GDR. When a hotel clerk asks to see his identification card at check-in his first evening, a feeling of guilt wells up in him and he fears he will be told that the hotel is already full:¹⁰

Die alte Bangigkeit, als die Frau im Hotelbuch nachsah. Das automatische Schuldgefühl, als sie meinen Ausweis verlangte. Die jahrelang geübte Bereitschaft, sofort einzusehn, daß schon seit vierzig Jahren leider kein Zimmer frei sei. Um schließlich, schon im Abgehn, mit kleiner, fast piepsiger Stimme, vorsichtig zu bemerken, daß es gewiß auch in zwei bis drei Stunden völlig zwecklos wäre, nach einem Zimmer zu fragen. Denn wann je im Leben hier überhaupt? Ach, einmal Scheißstaat rufen. Wenigstens im Abgehn noch. Scheißstaat aus der Tiefe des Bauchs vorzubellen oder zu flüstern zumindest. Und dann ab ins Dunkel, bloß fort, daß sie mich hier, in der Nähe der Grenze, nicht noch verhafteten. (28)

The wanderer's reaction here highlights his liminal status. Although reason should convince him that now the GDR no longer exists in its original form, he should no longer fear GDR-style treatment, his ingrained, irrational fears continue to plague him. Despising what he consciously recognizes as irrational fears, he childishly rebels against the GDR for its totalitarianism by imagining himself uttering aloud the word "Scheißstaat." Demonstrating his comical cowardice, he then tempers his rebellious urge with the phrases "Wenigstens im Abgehn noch" and "zu flüstern zumindest." Although the traveler keeps this admonition to himself, in publishing the man's thoughts in this book, Rosenlöcher courageously expresses openly a criticism of the GDR's repressiveness which would have been impossible a mere few months earlier. In depicting the insulting reactions the man receives from East and West Germans and his repeated difficulties getting used to the new circumstances, Rosenlöcher convincingly portrays the rapid and complex cultural transformation which took place in East Germany after the Wall was opened. In this liminal situation a person's actions and experiences often appear comical.

A similar scene occurs on the third day of his hike. Finding what he thinks is a border guard still at his post at the supposedly open border in his first attempt to cross over to the West, he exhibits an unnecessary and thus comical cowardice by turning around and heading back East:

Vor einem Jahr fünf Schritte hier, und ich läge am Zaun. [. . .] Aus einem der Rechteckfenster zielte grinsend ein Kerl mit einem Stock auf mich. "Ich gehe hier nur spazieren," sagte ich, schon im Gehen. "Ich wollte gar nicht nach dem Westen," erklärte ich demonstrativ. Und entfernte mich möglichst gelassen, immer den Knüppel im Rücken. "Ich bin nämlich Schriftsteller, falls Sie hier wissen, was das bedeutet", erläuterte ich, endlich wieder im Osten, hinter dem rettenden Zaun. Doch meine Seele war bis an ihre Spitzen ergraut. (72)

10 The name of the hotel at which he stays, "Zum wilden Jäger," bears ironic meaning when applied to the narrator. Although he physically resembles a "wild hunter," the way he acts is more like a "chaotic coward."

This confrontation, like the hotel scene above, illustrates not only his comical, paranoid fear but also his irrepressible compulsion to defend himself. The self-defensive tactics he uses—initially pretending as if he had not wanted to cross the border in the first place, then invoking his status as a writer—are laughable because they once again cast him as an East German. His paranoia marks him as adhering to his past habits, even though he now lives in a new and vastly different present. By renouncing his initial desire to cross over to the West like one who is used to accepting defeat or at least the denial of his wishes, he discloses his GDR socialization. The evocation of his profession as a writer also appears silly and ineffectual. In general such paranoid confrontations appear comical because they are rationally and practically unnecessary. Since, in each situation, nothing truly tragic occurs, the reader laughs sympathetically at the wanderer's irrational fears and maladroit ways of dealing with them. The anthropologist Don Handelman writes that "[t]error and play are forceful modes of introducing uncertainty, and their affinities are undeniable."¹¹ The above scenes, in which the fictional poet experiments or "plays" with new situations and experiences terror, effectively convey the uncertainties facing East Germans after the *Wende*.

The Mock Harz Pilgrimage as the Quest for a New Identity

Analogies can be drawn between Rosenlöcher's fictional, laborious journey over the Harz Mountains and a spiritual pilgrimage. That his wanderer takes the journey on foot, endures difficult trials, and undergoes an enlightening identity transformation on reaching its end, grants his journey the basic elements of such a pilgrimage. Moreover, the fact that one of his goals is to climb the Brocken, the highest peak in the Harz Mountains, which had been closed to the public in the GDR because of its strategic military position on the border of the Federal Republic, shows that he is interested in participating in a centuries-old German tradition. Goethe, Heine, and innumerable other Germans had climbed the Brocken and still do because of its height and its pagan significance as the sacred site of the *Walpurgisnacht*, a carnivalesque ritual that takes place each year to drive away evil spirits and welcome the coming of spring. While Rosenlöcher's wanderer arrives too late in the summer to participate in the *Walpurgisnacht* festivities, he still aligns himself with hundreds of other Germans on their way to the summit.

11 *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1990) 67.

Another method Rosenlöcher employs to turn this journey into a mock religious event is to give his wandering pilgrim a fictional saint as a travel companion. While Rosenlöcher has the pilgrim comically critique himself, nearly everyone he meets, and several canonical literary figures, there is one person with whom he has the man seriously commiserate: his fictional compatriot "Saint Ernst." "Saint Ernst" serves as an example of what happens to saintly figures when they enter the cruel, modern world: "Sogar für Sankt Ernst ging ich mit, den einer dieser Gegenwartsmenschen mit seinem Auto einfach umgemangelt hatte, so daß Sankt Ernst schon seit Wochen im Vogtland im Streckverband lag" (57). Creating a figure called "Sankt Ernst," whose name can be translated as "Saint Serious," and then having him sustain an accident that immobilizes him, Rosenlöcher symbolically frees his protagonist from all seriousness so he can act like a clown and depict his experiences with humor. Having a saint with whom he can sympathize, if only in his thoughts, also assists him in his physical and spiritual battle against the brutality of the "modern" people he meets. St. Ernst functions as a conscientious reminder that the traveler should record his observations of the natural world ("Gerade weil die Natur sich immer weiter von uns entfernte und längst in sich selbst zurückzog, war jede kleine Notiz ein Appell, doch noch eine Weile zu bleiben" [40]) and that he should persist in his walking and not rely on mechanized vehicles to propel him forward ("Wenn du dich unterwegs mitnehmen lässt, ist deine Wanderung gleich nichts mehr wert', sagte mein Freund St. Ernst" [56]). Even the saint becomes an object of satire, however, because of his nagging pedantry: "Er jedenfalls, so St. Ernst, habe als Naturbeobachter jede Kleinigkeit wichtig genommen und bei seinen ornithologischen Studien auch einmal eine zufällig vorbeikommende Stubenfliege (*Musca domestica*) schriftlich festgehalten" (40). Turning to a fictional religious figure as imaginary support in a time of constant change indicates the protagonist's need to rely on an iconical, morally superior figure as a steadfast bulwark unaffected by earthly turmoil. That Rosenlöcher has the saint ironically be hit by a car—that is, directly affected by a worldly event—highlights the selfish carelessness of modern people and the vulnerability of things perceived to be invulnerable. Turning St. Ernst into a satirical object, he simultaneously suggests a need for such bulwarks and calls them into question for being inadequate protection in such unstable times.

Rosenlöcher further connects his wanderer's hike to a spiritual pilgrimage by granting the man's shoes several ritual, symbolic functions that bond his journey to those of other pilgrims. Since his old, East German shoes are neither comfortable nor stable enough to withstand the rough, mountainous terrain, they cause him pain throughout his hike and

thus serve as a trivialized form of self-mortification resembling the flagellations medieval monks inflicted on themselves along their pilgrimages to holy places. When it rains, his shoes "quietschten, und die den Weg entlangkommenden Bäche flossen direkt durch sie durch" (73). Not only does their uncomfortable shape torture him, but also the fact that he loses one of them while riding a ski lift (39). Naturally, he views the loss and subsequent embarrassing recovery as punishment for his having ridden a ski lift up a hill instead of walking (see St. Ernst's warning above). As he walks, the shoes gradually fall apart, forcing him to buy new, West German ones: "Doch gerade jetzt, wo alle Welt hier im Wald herumliief, war die Verteidigung des wirklichen Wanderns auf meine Füße gestellt: auch wenn sich meine Schuhsohle leider im Prozeß der Ablösung befand" (76). Since Rosenlöcher connects the shoes' disintegration and eventual replacement with a western pair to the narrator's sloughing off and assuming a new, more optimistic identity, the reader can interpret the narrator's entire journey to be a successfully completed spiritual pilgrimage. Although he trivializes Christian metaphors here, this trivialization cannot entirely eclipse the journey's spiritual nature.

Even the text's spiritually uplifting ending is not free of paradox and irony, however. Wolfgang Emmerich points out the contradiction in Rosenlöcher's critiques of the West, apparent in the final scene, which takes place when the narrator arrives in the West German village of Goslar: "Die ironische Schlußpointe besteht im Kauf neuer Westschuhe (Marke "Mephisto"), mit denen er sich nun den kapitalistischen Westen mühelos erwandern wird."¹² The (French!) shoe brand "Mephisto," recalling Goethe's Mephisto, functions symbolically and implies that, like Faust, this wanderer will be granted a new realm of knowledge, in this case knowledge of how to master the transition to a free-market, democratic society. Tobias Völkel reveals the irony of this misleading optimism: "Obwohl das Ende des Buches scheinbar mit dem Verständnis des Ostdeutschen für die kapitalistischen Westdeutschen endet, so macht der Kauf eines Schuhs der Marke Mephisto doch deutlich, daß es sich hierbei nur um eine Verführung gehandelt hat."¹³ Hope triumphs at journey's end, however, through a poem appended to the travelogue. In it, the narrator gazes into a pool of water and undergoes a life-altering, hallucinatory experience, emerging prosaically ready to take the bus back home:

Am Grenzhang abwärts, an verschwiegener Stelle,
ging noch ein Wasser über einen Stein.

12 *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1996) 504.

13 "Referat: Buchvorstellung. Thomas Rosenlöcher: Die Wiederentdeckung des Gehens beim Wandern (Harzreise)," Online, 16 November 1999 <<http://www.whv.shuttle.de/whv/kaethekollwitz/deutsch/tobias~1.html>>.

Die Oberfläche, schwach in sich gekrümmt,
 war gläsern fest und zitterte kaum merklich,
 da ich die Lippen auf die Fläche legte.
 Und unter mir, tief unterm Eis des Wassers,
 die Blumen und die Farne wanken sah
 und tiefer noch, in einer Grotte
 aus reglos schimmernden Metallen,
 den Käferkönig und die Schaumzikade,
 die Schaumzikade und den Käferkönig
 auf goldnen Füßen rasch nach hinten eilen,
 als schaue ich auf meiner Kindheit Grund.
 Eisige Kälte drang mir bis ins Hirn.
 Schwarmdiamanten schossen hin und her.
 [...]

Nicht weiß die Unschuld, welches Rohr sie schluckt.
 Drei Tage war ich bis hierher gewandert,
 und fünf Minuten von hier fuhr ein Bus. (90)

Entitled "Das Zitterbild," the poem testifies not without irony to the fact that the wandering poet has regained his ability to write poetry and thus fulfilled the purpose of his journey only after having suffered physically and spiritually: "Spielt das Ende des Prosatextes auf den problematischen, ja prekären Erwerb einer neuen Identität an, so evoziert das unmittelbar darauf folgende Gedicht *Das Zitterbild*, das den eigentlichen Schluß des Bandes bildet und gleichsam als Resümee der Identitätssuche fungiert, vor allem den endgültigen Verlust der alten Identität."¹⁴ Although the titular "flickerpicture" describes the poet's identity as fluctuating, that he is able to create such a poem affirms his ability to perform creatively in the FRG as he had in the GDR.

Guilt by Association: Western Stereotypes and Eastern Defensive Metaphors

On his hike westward, Rosenlöcher's wanderer exposes himself to many situations that amplify differences between East and West German cultures and attitudes and draw out the author's satirical stance toward specific West German prejudices against the East. In the Eastern town of Quedlinburg, the wanderer encounters a West German tour group and overhears a tourist exclaim: "'Das wird dauern, bis die hier im Osten gelernt haben, was eigentlich Arbeiten ist'" (20). Rosenlöcher counters this comment immediately with the jab "bemerkte eine Kleinbildkamera spitz," referring to this tourist as the 35 millimeter camera he wears

14 Grauert 108. Grauert interprets the poem in detail on pages 108-109.

around his neck (20). Other members of the group, looking at the run-down buildings, exclaim with indignation: "Was haben die hier aus unserem Deutschland gemacht!" (21). They then turn to the hapless wanderer, as if he were personally responsible:

Alle Apotheker sahn mich von der Seite an. Woher wußten sie, daß ich das aus Deutschland gemacht hatte? Ich allein hatte schuld, wo keiner sich erinnern konnte. Daß keiner sich erinnern konnte, war auch meine Schuld. Die Schuld, im Verfall keine Sprache für den Verfall gefunden zu haben. Denn wer eine Sprache fand, hatte das Land schon verlassen, das, doch als Kummerland meins, auf einmal den Apothekern gehörte. (21-22)

Using the metonymy of the 35 millimeter camera and the metaphor of the "Apotheker" to label West Germans while displaying their prejudices, Rosenlöcher paints a satirical portrait, demonstrating how their (to them) apparently harmless comments provoke an identity crisis. His wanderer's reaction to their accusations represents the East German dilemma when confronted with such Western prejudices. Unable to slough off the comments, he accepts the entire blame for the dilapidated state of his country because he was one of those who stayed, both before and after the Wall came down. As the only East German object of these West German accusations, he stands metonymically for his whole country. The fact that his guilt is based on his inability to remember *how* his country came to be in such a mess, that he was and is unable even to put his experiences into words, points to the difficulty East Germans, in particular East German authors, have in coming to terms with their socialist past and in communicating their biographies to Westerners.¹⁵ Particularly significant in the German context, where memory, forgetting, and coming to terms with the past are major issues, Rosenlöcher effectively displays the confusion and speechlessness produced by the opening of the border when East Germans were suddenly forced to explain how they could have allowed the development of—and survived within—an economically inviable, repressive regime. The author portrays this communication barrier with a comic irony that reveals its seriousness.

Rosenlöcher's calling a poet and his dependence on language as a self-defensive mechanism can be seen in his frequent use of metaphors and metonymies like those above to condense his descriptions and ironic attacks.¹⁶ Most West Germans are identified by their appearance: their

15 See also Grauert's discussion of Rosenlöcher's search for a new authorial identity in the *Harzreise* (103-118).

16 Rosenlöcher was best known in the GDR for his poetry collections *Ich lag im Garten bei Kleinschachwitz* (1982) and *Schneebier* (1988). Since 1989 he has also written a diary of the revolution, *Die verkauften Pflastersteine. Dresdner Tagebuch* (1990), and several other poetry collections, including *Ich sitze in Sachsen und schau in den Schnee* (1999).

attire, cars, or tourist status. Not only is the West German tour group encountered in Quedlinburg a group of "Kameras" (20), but a man in the hotel bar is also a "Pullover" (32). Such people drive fancy cars called "Chromschiffe," which contrast with the "sogenannten Trabanten, die auch eine Stoßstange hatten und auch eine Kühlerhaube, so daß mit dem Wahrbild der Technik aller Gerätschaft Hinfälligkeit klappernd herangaloppierte" (26). Here, the vivid description and onomatopoeic words bring to life a limping, sputtering Trabi. Rosenlöcher produces a comical effect by repeating these metaphors throughout the text. Like Henri Bergson's jack-in-the-box, they pop up in various contexts, as funny leitmotifs.¹⁷ They reduce, for example, West German men to "Apotheker" (21), who have the reputation in Germany of being wealthy and charging high prices. Like parasites, pharmacists depend on human illness for their livelihood. The wanderer recognizes these "Apotheker" by their "Erwerbsblick" and the fact that they drive around in cars in order to experience the world. In German, this creates a pun: "fahren" (to drive) in order to "erfahren" (experience) the world (24). Once he even mistakes a newly-rich East German driving a shiny new "Chromschiff" for one of these West German "Apotheker": "Der plötzliche Auftritt von Ostapothekern machte mein Weltbild noch komplizierter" (25). This admission demonstrates that the man does not condemn West Germans per se, but rather the way they appear and act. Reacting to the unfamiliar and disturbing new attitudes and values entering his reality, he distances himself by lending them humorous and derogatory names.

Rosenlöcher's hiker-poet also enjoys creating amusing new compound words to describe his simultaneously old and new environment. "Bedeutungsgewitter" is the effect produced by West German newspapers on their readers (11). This may be understood physically (their large size produces a loud rustle when read) and metaphorically (packed with information, reading them is like being bombarded by a thunderstorm). An East German pocket watch is a "Grobchronometer" (36) and an "Untergangsdenkmal" (37). "Schnürsenkelideen" are various disparate, often nonsensical ideas that occur to the narrator while hiking in the mountains (55). In such words disparate concepts are welded together, representing the linguistic and political confusion in which the poet lives.

One characteristic of metaphors and metonymies is their ambiguity: they connote more than just their surface meaning. Although the poet repeatedly uses the word "Apotheker" derogatorily, the word also has

17 Henri Bergson, "Laughter," from *Comedy: An Essay [by] George Meredith and Laughter [by] Henri Bergson*, ed. Wylie Sypher (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1956) 105-110. Bergson uses the "jack-in-the-box," a toy that repeatedly pops open to surprise its (child) possessor, to refer to comical situations that provoke laughter by occurring repeatedly.