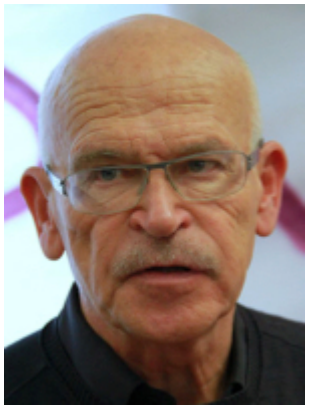
Wallraff, Günter

(1942 –)



After some lyrical experiments reminiscent, for instance, of G. Trakl and W. Borchert, Hans-Günter Wallraff (W.) distanced himself permanently from the “literature of the literati” and began, in the mid-1960s, an extensive documental output.

Considering himself part of a literary tradition beginning, in Germany, in the 19th century – the “Arbeiterliteratur” (literature by and for the working class) (Romain / Töteberg, 1978:2, 3) – and connecting this with an intense social and political commitment, W. intended to bring to the public forum, under a merciless gaze, socio-political realities of which the “small” are victims, but which are hidden or denied by the responsible for them and unknown to the larger public. The ultimate goal of his work, spanning reports, documentaries, interviews, films and plays is not, however, the exposure of specific cases, but instead the exposure of mind frames and behaviours with the objective of raising social and political awareness in the public and the consequent change in society – a change which, he later came to recognize, literature alone could not bring about (*idem*: 6).

If W.’s intention – in Heiner Müller’s words, a “postmodern Robin Hood in the service of all the irreverent, humiliated and offended” (*idem*: 10) – is shared with the documental literature that had been published in Germany beginning in the early 1960s, his research method, although not innovative, was quite peculiar, always creating not only great impact and sales, but also controversy.

G. W. did not limit himself, as is common, to collecting information and/or undertaking political analysis. What gives his texts their power is the desire to show, which presupposes

the absence of a distance between the self and the other, a becoming part of what one intends to present, that is, engaging in “immersive” journalism, so as to collect authentic material. Thus, he both “created” documentation through provocative actions and infiltrated his target environment through the repeated use of disguise. The fictional identity he assumed resulted in many different roles, sometimes with a relevant social position (e.g. ministerial advisor [Braun, 2007: 27]), but almost always as a socially inoffensive individual. In the F.R.G. he disguised himself, for instance, as a Turkish immigrant, as a Thyssen and McDonald’s worker (Ganz unten, 1985), as an alcoholic in a psychiatric institution, as a homeless person in a shelter, as a worker in a chemical plant (13 unerwünschte Reportagen, 1969), or as na editor at sensationalist tabloid Bild-Zeitung (among other publications, Der Aufmacher [1977], Zeugen der Anklage [1979]). Abroad, he played, for instance, the role of active opponent to the Greek military regime (Unser Faschismus nebenan. Griechenland gestern – ein Lehrstück für morgen, 1975). His investigations, often set to paper collaboratively with other authors, contributed to locating Ludwig Hahn, a senior official at the Warsaw ghetto and partly responsible for the deportation of thousands of Jews to concentration and extermination camps extermínio (*idem*: 23).

Recognised, criticised and feared for an oeuvre that soon found international success (see, for instance, Ganz unten, a bestseller translated in over thirty countries, or the Swedish verb “att wallraffa,” used in reference to unusual investigations (http://desv.dict.cc/?s=att+wallraffa), the polemical journalist was, in his youth, a member of the literary group Gruppe 61, and soon after a founding member of the Werkkreis Literatur der Arbeitswelt (literature of the working world), editor of the magazines Pardon and konkret, and an independent author starting in 1973. He has been the recipient of several accolades (e.g. the Gerrit-Engelke literary prize [1980], the medal of the International League for Human Rights [1984], the Jean d’Arcy prize [1987], a British Academy of Film and Television Arts award [1987], and the August Bebel prize [2013]). At the same time, he’s been involved in several lawsuits and controversies, started not only by the powerful enemies his publications earned him, but also by collaborators who accused him of appropriating work (Romain / Töteberg, 1978: 10).

During the 1990s, the time between W.'s investigations increases, but his desire to expose the dark side of the F.R.G. did not. He focused primarily on interviews and (re)editions, TV commentary, prefaces and afterwords to the works of others, as well as manifestations of solidarity with threatened and persecuted authors – see the case of Turkish author Aziz Nesin (Romain/Töteberg, 1978: 11) or of Iranian rapper Shahin Najafi.

Portugal

Abandoning his most common method, W. did not disguise himself when he visited Portugal in 1975-76, a troubled time marked by, for instance, the right wing's violent attacks on left wing parties' headquarters, and during which the turbulence and the developments of the Carnation Revolution made international news and attracted foreign supporters. It's possible that he came both as a supporter of the Agrarian Reform (he was a member of the German Solidarity Committee which raised funds for cooperatives) and as an author-journalist already well known in Portuguese academic circles. He was then received by President of the Portuguese Republic General Costa Gomes, gave a lecture at the Faculty of Arts in Lisbon on "A reportagem como literatura" ["The report as literature"] (Meyer-Clarson, 2013: 371), and, according to oral accounts, was invited to speak at the Goethe-Institut in Lisbon and Coimbra by its directors, respectively, Curt Meyer-Clarson and Karl-Heinz Delille. However, most of his three month stay took place at one of the more dynamic agricultural cooperatives, "Estrela Vermelha" ["Red Star"], in the Baixo Alentejo province. His goal was to experience the Agrarian Reform *in loco* and be a part of the agricultural workers' collective, which he would later work into a publication.

However, from a short journey to the north of Portugal, namely to Braga and Póvoa de Varzim, came a radical change in plans. In collaboration with journalist Hella Schlumberger, W. published the results of one of his investigations, which led him to uncover a right-wing conspiracy which intended to forcefully remove the mostly socialist recent government – Aufdeckung einer Verschwörung. Die Spínola-Aktion (1976; reedited 1987), immediately

translated into Portuguese by R. M. Peixoto as A Descoberta de uma Conspiração. A Acção Spínola (1976).

As a result of the investigation, and before the alleged imminence of the coup, predictably in May or June 1976 (DC-AS: 111), G. W. publicly denounced Spínola's plans in early April of the same year, before the book's publication, in the widely circulated magazine Stern, at a press conference in Bonn, in an interview to the Portugal Nachrichten newspaper (DC-AS: 217-220), on German television programme "Panorama" (*idem*: 154). The effects of this were soon felt. Several German and Swiss publications ran the story and commented on the coup's failure, Spínola's connection to Strauß reached the German parliament (*idem:* 143), Switzerland extradited the general to Brazil (*idem*: 151). In Portugal, O Diário and O Jornal published the entirety of Stern's report (*idem*: 145), while O Comércio do Porto had reservations regarding the truthfulness of the news (*idem*: 146); in W.'s perspective, public opinion shifted between elation and accusations of fictitiousness and of international communist intervention (*idem*: 145), with a prominent figure questioning the ease with which the journalist infiltrated the MDLP (*idem*: 147) – as did a Swiss newspaper (*idem*: 154). By the end of that same month, Spínola had ordered the suspension of activities in the MDLP (April 29th).

Aufdeckung einer Verschwörung is a simply structured and worded book. The first part transcribes conversations covertly recorded by W. between himself and several figures of the Portuguese right-wing, from ultraconservative clergymen to bombers and even former President of the Portuguese Republic, General António de Spínola. These transcriptions, interspersed with some photographical evidence, are coupled with extremely detailed information (people, dates, locations) and authorial commentary and clarification, with the reader's full understanding of the coup d'état project in view. This is followed by several and diverse pieces of complementary documental evidence, some of them facsimiles (e.g. "[d]ocumentos secretos de Spínola" ["Spínola's secret documents"]; the reactions of Portuguese and foreign publications to the discovery of the conspiracy; a chronology of the signs of a right-wing coup; two interviews with G. W. published in Germany, etc.).

It seems that W.'s contact with circles connected with the MDLP (an anti-Communist political group responsible for violent actions against left-wing parties in the summer of 1975 and April of 1976, presided over by the then in exile General Spínola) stemmed more from curiosity and professional habit than from a previously calculated agenda. With H. Schlumberger's assistance as a mediator, due to her good knowledge of Portuguese, coupled with her own investigative experience, W. skilfully earned the MDLP's trust, beginning with mercenaries and middle management in the North of the country. Feigning abetment, the journalist introduced himself as a German nationalist, the secret emissary of a German right-wing organization sent to mediate arms supply and the financing of the battle against the Portuguese revolution. Surprisingly, the former Portuguese president did not distrust the "[e]nviados em missão secreta na questão da Solidariedade Internacional Fascista" ["secret mission envoys on the question of the International Fascist Solidarity"] (*idem*: 35), nor did he suspect the substantial aid on offer from the FRG.

A meeting thus took place, in Düsseldorf on March 25th 1976, between W. – who, havng since returned to the FRG, sensibly arrives in a (borrowed) Mercedes, "gravata listrada de preto-vermelho-amarelo" ["black-red-yellow striped tie"], "isqueiro dourado e quinquilharia do género" ["golden lighter and similar knick-knacks"] (*idem*: 71-72) –, two political representatives of the MDLP, and Spínola himself, who secretly left Switzerland, where he then resided, for a day for this purpose. To make his disguise believable, W. sets the further trap of having the purported "president" of the purported German organization (who was, in fact, an old acquaintance of the journalist) attend the meeting. During the rendezvous, between analyses of the Portuguese political situation, past and present, the three Portuguese participants make the support they have in Portugal clear, as well as their objectives, and request technical and financial support for both the coup and the coming political reorganization in Portugal. Committed to the "eliminação total do comunismo em Portugal" ["total elimination of communism in Portugal"] (*idem*: 93) and considering "os partidos socialistas e sociais-democratas […] um perigo ainda maior do que os comunistas" ["the socialist and social-democrat parties (…) an even greater danger than the communists"] (*ibidem*), Spínola says: "O nosso grande plano é […] mobilizar as massas

populares e sermos então capazes de apoiar, com armas, a multidão revoltada" ["Our great plan is (…) to mobilize the populace and then be able to support the crowd in revolt with arms"] (*idem*: 95), and "não esqueça as armas de bordo para helicópteros. Essas armas destinam-se sobretudo ao uso contra população civil, operários em greve, manifestantes, trabalhadores de cooperativas que se recusem a devolver as suas terras" ["don't forget the on-board weapons for helicopters. Those are to be used mostly against the civilian population, workers on strike, protesters, cooperative workers who refuse to give back their land"] (*idem*: 96).

At the end of March there was another meeting, this time without Spínola, who sent from Switzerland a list of the requested arms and sabotage material (*idem*: 117-120). A few days later, W. publicly denounced the conspiracy.

Aufdeckung einer Verschwörung's disparaging image of the northern Portuguese and of coup defenders in particular is also of note. This is perhaps due to documental literature's, despite claims to authenticity, being the product of an author, like any other literary text, who selects and collates the material they gathered, and because G. W.'s interests were focused on the upcoming putsch, but the truth remains that the portrait is reductive. Northerners are presented as reactionary, backwards, and functionally illiterate (around 90%) (*idem:* 13), while the coup defenders are portrayed as somewhat ridiculous, with an unyielding naïveté and gullibility, exposing the details of a project which should be kept secret without reservations.

Travels

Greece, Israel, Japan, Nicaragua, Portugal.

Quotations

Archbishop Francisco da Silva: […] Communism launches its attacks against religion, family and property. Since defense does not suffice, one must energetically proceed towards the offensive in factories, offices, markets, banks, administrations. […] All proletarianization is the work of the Devil. (translated from AV-SA: 11-12)

[Manuel] Teixeira [commando officer]: "We're not religious, but Francisco, the archbishop, is one of ours. I know him quite well. He made his seminary available to us for the first meeting between the ELP and the MDLP, back when Copcon […] still existed and one could still be arrested." (translated from AV-SA: 25-26)

[W.]: "This political crime story became a bestseller on the [Portuguese] newsagents. Crowds flock to the newsstands and in cafés men and women read, fascinated, the almost four-page long report and it becomes a hot topic of discussion. Here too, opinions differ. (translated from AV-SA: 110)

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