

1998

## Bert Papenfuß: Tiské

Erk Grimm

*Columbia University / Barnard College*

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### Recommended Citation

Grimm, Erk (1998) "Bert Papenfuß: Tiské," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 25: Iss. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v25i0.1265>

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as she dismantles her previous world, she is not without sympathy for the memories she conjures up of her grandmother or the Russian children who once lived in her midst.

Her demolition plans take on one final target: a large sofa soaked to the springs with the sweat of previous generations. It is associated with the narrator's grandmother, an early twentieth-century socialist, a woman of strong character and constitution. Like an animal, the sofa is overtaken, conquered, but respectfully, almost mournfully, put to rest.

With deconstruction (not destruction!) of her past life complete, it is time for the *Überfliegerin* to take flight: "Meine Zukunft irrt durch die weite Welt." She wings her way to the United States, to Minneapolis, Madison, and San Francisco. Like flight in a dream, the reader soars, then dives into each of the narrator's impressions of lives and objects that had existed simultaneous with her own life: "Nur sechs Stunden versetzt, lief es seit zwanzig Jahren auf derselben Erdkugel ab, nur an einer anderen Stelle der Krümmung. Nun erfuhr ich das als zufällig." The narrator's experience of the United States is unequivocally freeing. It is permeated with nature as a living force: expansive landscape, cacti that intermingle with the structure of a house, a car decomposing in the mire of a gully. In San Francisco the landscape shifts to a pile of second-hand clothing that envelops her with numerous possible identities: "... in welcher Welt wollte ich wer sein, wenn man schon die Wahl hat?"

Flying further West, the narrator descends into Russia. It is not by accident that memories of home return on this particular voyage. Home is interminably intertwined with Russian history: the end of the GDR is heralded with "Die Russen sind fort!" The narrator experiences the withdrawal of the Russian people from her homeland with melancholy. Her visit to Russia now is at the invitation of a childhood friend with whom she had exchanged letters: "Es waren die achtziger Jahre. Es waren die Jahre des Briefverkehrs." And, indeed, she finds some remnants of that earlier shared time and her attraction to the Russian people. In the 1990s, however, the Russian milieu is dominated by the market. The narrator's childhood friend is married to an entrepreneur, who now is driven by a chauffeur in a limousine, but tomorrow will lose everything. The narrator's friend is consumed with amassing hard currency on the black market, only to exchange it in turn for whatever objects can be had. Whereas in the United States the car is left to slowly decompose as if it were returning to a natural state, in Russia the car in the courtyard is surrounded by men dismantling it for parts.

The narrator's unease with this new Russia is exacerbated further by her confrontation with another grandmother. This grandmother too has a sofa and early twentieth-century notions that the narrator instinctively fears. She takes to the air again, this time fleeing, in flight.

Like a work of high modernism, the literary techniques of montage, interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness, rather than plot, characterize this work. The reader accompanies Krauß on a flight through a dreamscape of impressions of objects, people, and places. In epic-like fashion Krauß constructs scenes which sometimes burst at the seams with thick description, yet always seem light as a haiku. The narration often takes on the function of poetry. *Die Überfliegerin* is a colorful, sensorial excursion that offers the reader an intimate glimpse of an East German's experience of memory and travel following unification. It does not partake of dichotomies; it does not destroy the GDR past and replace it with the Western future. "Ich zerlege alles bis auf das Skelett," says the narrator, "und dann setze ich es fehlerlos wieder zusammen." Krauß views the past and the present with respect; and respectfully, with fear and anticipation, she moves on to the future.

N. Ann Rider  
*Indiana State University*

**Papenfuß, Bert. *Tiské*. Ill. by A. R. Penck and CD recordings by O. T. and Novemberclub. Göttingen: Steidl, 1994.**

For more than a decade Bert Papenfuß has clearly established his status as the most creative representative of a circle of poets linked to the "unofficial" activities in East Berlin in the 1980s. Whereas many veterans of the now fragmented alternative culture of the former GDR have fallen into silence, Papenfuß has continued to be an extraordinarily prolific writer. His volume *Tiské* gives ample evidence of both the artistic bricolage and the non-conformist political agenda Papenfuß has subscribed to, stubbornly clinging to the anarchist appeal of the hand-made literary journals of the previous decade. *Tiské*—meaning "exit" (spelled backwards) or "German" in Danish—consists of almost fifty poems, interlaced by A. R. Penck's hefty ink drawings and supplemented by sound recordings of readings on a CD. Paradoxically, this ambitious multi-media concept does not yield formal perfection. Penck's archaic pictographs occasionally correspond with the motifs of the poems, but more often these bold brushstrokes literally blacken the poems' densely woven web of puns and corny jokes. Predominantly, *Tiské* is concerned with the political changes of the "Wende." A few poems evoke experiences in a partnership, like teasing a sleepy lover or praising a lost muse. In a love poem entitled "ouroboroid nach hermann von pückler-muskau," the poet uses a circular design, the ouroboros, to underline affinities to the famous aristocratic horticulturist who dedicated s-shaped garden ornaments to his beloved "Schnucke." Papenfuß's quirky idiom has little to do with what critics have superficially denounced as the

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East German version of Dada or Konkrete Poesie. Instead, the main thrust is directed toward a rediscovery of Rabelais, Villon, Fischart or Multatuli in order to explode the doctrine of Becher, Kurella, and the "Kulturerbe." Half-mockingly, half-sympathetically, the poet refers to classical poets; for instance, in "süßer odin" the mythical image of a chaste national hero Hölderlin is dismantled. Most of the poems in this volume, however, explore the impact of German reunification on the existence of the individual. In reviewing the events of 1989, a certain disorientation is expressed in a tone that constantly oscillates between rage and sober contemplation. The poet's alertness and irritability what he calls his "alarmbereiztheit" (60)—indicate uncertainty about the changes to come. Nevertheless—s it is already clear to him that the new political landscape must be the result of a "verschaukelung," referring to the alleged deception of the electorate. Things are no longer what they are, there is only "mennige uff jold" (31), minium on gold, as a telling line in the Berlin dialect indicates. The reunification has left the once energetic poet in a rather melancholic mood, but it is rarely admitted; occasionally he is "wutbrütend," thinking of murder (29) but mostly he feels insecure trying to hide from the signs of historical change: "ich schließe mich ein" (60). Yet, even his abode is not a home anymore: "hier will ich ja bleiben: / aber wo" (59). Confronted with another political status quo, the poet feels torn between staying and moving away from Berlin: "fortschreiten möchte man / & zwar möglichst fort" (61). In his most ironical comment, Papenfuß introduces himself in the mask of a French intellectual, thus claiming the role of a distant and unemotional observer: "zur westandacht / rauchte ich sechsundzwanzig / jean paul sartre gedächtniszigaretten / der zerschossene schwarze rollkragen / soll mir gestanden haben" (45). The quipping reference to Sartre makes one think of his famous play *Les mouches* which addresses the act of liberation from a totalitarian regime; but Papenfuß's stance is ambiguous: on the one hand, the supposedly detached witness is as critical of the people's passivity and repentance as Sartre's protagonist Orest. In this respect he seems to share the French intellectual's social critique. The East German poet, however, is not bothered by any "flies" or agonies of conscience—he portrays himself as a cynical anti-hero who believes in natural rejuvenation rather than in existential decisions concerning self-liberation. Amusingly, the contemplative individual finds redemption in a Fountain of Youth: "in nachdenklicher haltung verharrend / entstieg ich umgestülpt dem jungbrunnen" (72). If one attempts to decipher the underlying political agenda of these poems, it becomes quite evident that Papenfuß does not see any signs of historical change: the "revolution" of 1989 has utterly failed. What remains is the belief in cyclical returns of vitality and male virility. In Papenfuß's anarchistic view, informed by Franz Jung and Max Stirner, the East German "underground" was confronted with the oppression by

bureaucratic socialism. And yet, in a strange way of retrospective reflection, it had offered security whereas people are now confronted with economic instability. Accordingly, the new market economy dictates a neat style of writing: "aus des widerstandes geborgenheit / der ich so lang verlegen war / muß ich mich schön schreiben" (73). Poetic calligraphy à la Stefan George lurks as the great danger to the poet who succumbs to the rules of the market-economy. Bert Papenfuß's resistance to the culture industry appears untimely, but it corresponds with the trust in the redemptive power of a language freed of all censorship and propagandistic misuse. Rather than communicating clear messages in the public arena, the poet demonstrates the art of punning, not shying away from the inanity of nursery rhymes: "laß dich beileibe nicht verbiermannen / & nicht auf verlangen verneilyoungen" (64) is one of the most strident attacks on popular radicals such as Wolf Biermann or Neil Young. To the anarcho-poet, political opposition in the arts appears already subjugated to the entertainment industry; he sees reunification as a fairy tale in modern times: from one day to the other the "kultspiel der machthabenden," the ritualistic propaganda of the GDR, was magically transformed into "ein medienspektakel für die ohnmächtigen," a TV-spectacle for the masses (68). In a cynical poem about November 1989, the celebration in the streets was nothing more than a "volksfest ohne erbarmen," another slip in German history which shows no regret and no awareness of the possibility of radical change: "jeder ausrutscher ein deutscher, sektgaben, freibier & gratis-sex / nichts bereuen"; thus it is "der totale mumienschanz" (67), a fancy-dress party turned into a ball of mummies.

Bert Papenfuß, however, does not completely reject role-playing. In *Tiské*, as in his previous volumes, he uses various personae to counter expectations concerning the poet as a symbolic figure and politically responsible intellectual. Instead he portrays himself as a freebooter and pirate sneaking through the system; or he plays a Celtic bard whose songs evoke a dim and distant past. Cutting across the real time-space coordinates, the subject imagines himself being one of the "sendboten enträtselter vorzeit" (42) who leaves us enigmatic notes about an East German "urnenfelderkultur" (9). In this bizarre perspective, life in the former GDR resembles a mythical period. Whereas the progression of history seems stalled in a time warp, the sense of place is equally distorted; like another Finnegan, the psyche is drifting between Prenzlauer Berg and sites in Ireland. In opposition to an emerging East German consumer society and a "counterculture" which has become equally commercialized as Berlin's new hip scene, the poetic voice announces a new place for itself: "gründet ihr erstmal euer scheidvolk / & ich dann den untergrunduntergrund" (69). Compared to other literary responses to the "Wende," *Tiské* maintains the playfully cryptic idiom that Papenfuß himself once attributed to an "ära des aktiven

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wortspiels" (although now with a less exotic spelling). As a sociohistorical document, the volume offers yet another facet of East German writers' uneasiness toward the newly gained freedom within the market-economy. Surprisingly, Bert Papenfuß's impulse to respond to the political situation by creating a rampant and provocative anti-art is betrayed by remarkably refined poems as "anschauung & verstand," "zur westandacht" or "albanien an der elbe" which should be included in every anthology dedicated to the literature of the German "Wende." It is perhaps no coincidence that in one striking example, "dichter zerfallen," we can find a hidden reference to Hans Magnus Enzensberger who created the figure of knifegrinder to illustrate the craft of the poet. Papenfuß reutilizes this concept to destruct the heroic image of the prophet-poet:

dichter zerfallen  
in orgeldreher & kritzelnbuben  
galeerenschleifer & scherenflicker  
es gibt hervorragende hofbarden  
& in der gosse auch idioten

One could indeed maintain that the best stanzas of *Tiské* find their equivalents in Enzensberger's *landessprache* (1960). Not surprisingly, the two poets denied the aesthetic value of their volumes: for them, the poem was merely an item of practical use, and as such the poems of *Tiské* should be read.

Erk Grimm  
Columbia University/Barnard College

**Tate, Dennis. *Franz Fühmann. Innovation and Authenticity: A study of his prose-writing*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995.**

Much of Franz Fühmann's work has suffered a distorted reception. The initial judgment of ideologically blinkered critics in East and West Germany, who tried to present Fühmann (1922-1984) as 'staatsdichter' on the one hand, and raised doubts about his creative integrity on the other, took a long time to recede. In the 1970s and 1980s Fühmann became better known and appreciated, largely due to his two autobiographical books *Zweiundzwanzig Tage oder die Hälfte des Lebens* (1973) and *Vor Feuerschlünden* (1982). Although both books have been translated into English, Dennis Tate is right to point out that Fühmann's international credentials have yet to be established. While two other GDR writers, Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym, have achieved international breakthroughs as a result of factors that make their work more than a paradigm of GDR literature—namely the significance of Wolf's writing in a wider feminist context and Heym's early reputation as a best-selling author in the USA—Fühmann has hitherto been

neglected in the English-speaking world. Dennis Tate attempts to change this with his book *Franz Fühmann. Innovation and Authenticity: A study of his prose-writing*.

Tate's monograph, the second after Hans Richter's *Franz Fühmann—ein deutsches Dichterleben* (1992), provides a full and coherent picture of Fühmann's development as a writer. Covering a huge body of different texts and genres (poetry, stories, essays, speeches), Tate's book is an invaluable source for scholars working on Fühmann. Moreover, readers interested in learning about the GDR and its writers will be rewarded with a subtle historical analysis of cultural policy in the GDR and with a cohesive yet complex biography that cuts across the periods of fascism, Stalinism, and post-Stalinism. Tate's unrelenting attempt to expose the difficulties, contradictions, and pains of a writer who gradually detached his creative process from a political doctrine effectively complicates the still prevalent reading of GDR literature, or more generally of social interactions and cultural productions in a dictatorship, in terms of affirmation or subversion. The contextualized biographical-political approach Tate chose for his study of Fühmann's prose-writing, however, might in the end inadvertently undermine his quite rightly announced aim, which is to show that Fühmann's work offers more than merely a paradigm of the general course of GDR literature.

*Franz Fühmann. Innovation and Authenticity* consists of five chronologically organized chapters. In the first chapter, "Educated for Auschwitz? Childhood, War and Soviet Captivity 1922-49," Tate reconstructs Fühmann's childhood in Bohemia, which had previously been a province of the Austro-Hungarian empire, was then integrated into the newly created part of Czechoslovakia and not long after annexed by Hitler. Mainly based on Fühmann's autobiographical cycle *Das Judenauto. 14 Tage aus zwei Jahrzehnten* (1962) and later interviews given by Fühmann, Tate draws out a somewhat paradoxical world of a child and young adult who, on the one hand, was absorbed in an alternative world of private fantasy, immersed in fairy tales, myths and a rich body of European literature (Joyce, Trakl, Rilke), but who, on the other hand, found an overwhelming sense of pleasure in becoming "a cog in the Nationalist Socialist machine" (13) and later in providing his self-effacing service to the new antifascist regime.

In the stimulating second chapter "Spokesman for the New Germany 1950-58," Tate traces Fühmann's development from a propagandist, cultural functionary, and *Staatsdichter* to a more innovative author who challenged the basic socialist realist notion that literature should be ideologically explicit. Tate not only challenges us to reevaluate our understanding of Fühmann in the 1950s as an unambiguous Stalinist but also to reconsider our assumption that the cultural landscape of the GDR in the 1950s was homogeneously affirmative. He presents Fühmann both as a propagandist who had no difficulty conforming to the