

Performing Editorial Authority in Ingo Schulze's Epistolary Novel *Neue Leben*

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One of the most obvious eccentricities in Ingo Schulze's epistolary novel, *Neue Leben* (*New Lives*, 2005), is the inclusion of an immense number of footnotes—380, to be exact. Although footnotes are a common feature of epistolary novels, their excessive use in *Neue Leben* complicates their relationship to the letters they gloss and calls for a reevaluation of the editor figure.¹ In earlier epistolary novels, the editor used footnotes sparingly to explain omissions—if, for instance, people were still alive who could be affected—or interventions, for example, if letters were missing.² The editor in *Neue Leben* addresses a different set of problems. He assumes a wide range of explanatory and critical functions as part of his relationship to the implied reader and to the letter writer Enrico Türmer. At stake in both relationships, I argue, is the editor's performance of authority as a new type of omniscient narrator: first, as a self-appointed expert on the German Democratic Republic (aka East Germany), and, second, as a more reliable narrator of the fictional world than the letter writer Enrico. The editor's questionable status as a figure of authority explains the strong reactions he has elicited from critics who have commented on his personality without contextualizing it within current narratological trends.³

In what follows, I read the figure of the editor and his footnotes as symptomatic of the contemporary shift towards omniscient narration, which Paul Dawson describes in *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator* (2013). Dawson argues that several important Anglo-American novelists have recently turned towards omniscient narration to reclaim their lost cultural authority. They stylize their narrators as public intellectuals who perform—rather than simply assume—their narrative authority in the extra-textual commentary they provide for the fictional world. The use of extra-textual discourse has allowed contemporary novelists to legitimize their claims to authority and to set themselves apart from their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century predecessors. Dawson specifies four types of narrators who appear omniscient because of their extra-textual commentary: the ironic moralist, the literary historian, the pyrotechnic storyteller, and the immersion journalist and social commentator. Schulze's editor, I argue, fits the mold of the last type: as a journalist-turned-editor, he provides extensive commentary for the letters written by Enrico to make them more accessible to younger readers.

The editor comments on a total of eighty-two letters that Enrico wrote between January 6 and July 11, 1990 to his sister Vera, friend Johann, and lover Nicoletta. The letters treat two important periods in Enrico's life: his contemporary

activities as owner of an advertising paper during German reunification and his childhood and coming of age in the GDR before the fall of the wall. The footnotes that the editor appends to the letters can be divided into two categories based on the information they provide and the authority they claim. In explanatory footnotes, the editor crosschecks Enrico's references to the GDR against extra-textual information that readers may find in newspapers, reference books, and other kinds of public records. By linking the fictional and extra-textual discourse through his commentary, the editor becomes a public intellectual in Dawson's sense: he provides readers with legitimate forms of knowledge and himself with the authority to address them. In critical footnotes, however, the editor reaches a limit in his performance of authority: he cannot refer to such extra-textual information, because Enrico has said and done many things that left no documentary trace. This forces the editor to call upon further fictional sources to correct Enrico's account, which complicates his relationship to Enrico and compromises his role as a public intellectual. The editor acts then as another letter writer—like Enrico—who presents readers with his own first-person account of the events immediately before and after reunification.

The tension that the explanatory and critical footnotes produce in the figure of the editor is built into the epistolary novel, although Schulze exploits it to a far greater degree than previous authors. In its eighteenth-century heyday, the epistolary novel tended to include multiple first-person narrators, which granted the editor the advantage of having belated access to the other letter writers' perspectives. In an interview with Uta Beiküfner, Schulze confirms this traditional role of the editor figure: "Der Herausgeber ist eine Figur wie die anderen . . . Der Leser soll wissen, dass es nirgendwo in diesem Buch einen festen Grund gibt, auch dort nicht, wo Ingo Schulze darunter steht. Dem ist womöglich am wenigsten zu trauen" (23) "The editor is a character just like the others . . . The reader should know that there is no firm ground in this book, not even there, where Ingo Schulze stands. He is probably the least trustworthy."⁴ Schulze's assessment of the editor presents only one aspect of his role, however: while the critical footnotes generate the mistrust that conflicting reports usually produce, the explanatory footnotes realize a potential inherent in the editor figure since Samuel Richardson, whose novels shaped the public discourse in England after the Glorious Revolution.⁵ Schulze's editor tries to establish a similar ideological coherence for German reunification in his role as a public intellectual—"intellectual" insofar as he demonstrates his knowledge of the East German past, and "public" insofar as he wants to inform a broad readership about it.

Schulze's innovation in the epistolary genre is not purely formal. As one of Germany's best-known novelists to write about German reunification, he is nonetheless skeptical about the possibility of constructing an overarching narrative about that time period. The difficulty stems from the distinction between private

and public history: in whose name is such an overarching narrative told, and to whom? By including both explanatory and critical footnotes in *Neue Leben*, Schulze thematizes this difficulty by means of the editor's questionable performance as a public intellectual. The editor reads Enrico's letters as part of a larger history but finds himself constrained by the fact that not everything in the letters can be crosschecked against a public record. This leads him to move freely between the fictional and extra-textual discourse. In order to make this argument, I will first look at Dawson's discussion of omniscient narration, then analyze the function of the novel's footnotes, and finally consider the epistolary genre and Schulze's innovation within it. Out of this analysis I will show how Schulze's novel can help us re-think the contested terrain of the *Wenderoman* (novel about German reunification).

The Return of Omniscient Narration in Contemporary Fiction

There has been controversy recently in the field of narratology concerning the utility of the concept of omniscient narration. In a 2004 article entitled "Omniscience," Jonathan Culler argues that literary scholars drop the term altogether due to its imprecision. Dawson acknowledges Culler's criticism in his aforementioned book, *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator*, but reintroduces the term with qualifications. This allows him to talk about omniscient narration as a contemporary phenomenon that addresses a specific set of problems, namely, the fragmentation of the public sphere and the decline of the cultural capital of literature. A close examination of the traditional features of omniscient narration reveals not only the imprecision of the term, as Culler understands it, but also its inadequacy for describing the performance of authority in the twenty-first century, as Dawson suggests.

In "Omniscience," Culler distinguishes four features that he believes literary scholars mistakenly label with the term omniscience:

- (1) the performative authoritativeness of many narrative declarations, which seem to bring into being what they describe; (2) the reporting of innermost thoughts and feelings, such as are usually inaccessible to human observers; (3) authorial narration, where the narrator flaunts her god-like ability to determine how things turn out; and (4) the synoptic impersonal narration of the realist tradition. (26)

For Culler, all of these features are distinct from each other, and literary scholars who apply the term omniscience to any one of them simply conflate their individual characteristics. Furthermore, Culler argues that the term, with its theological overtones, is not really appropriate for designating features that are the result of

convention. The first two features—narratorial knowledge of the story world and characters' thoughts and feelings—are constitutive of all fiction writing, and readers accept them as part of the reading experience (28). Culler claims that literary scholars describe the last two characteristics—the narrator's metafictional comments about the story world and universalizing reflections on human nature—most commonly with the term omniscience. His case against metafictional commentary is not fully clear, as he considers it too theologically complex for his essay (30).⁶ He dismisses universalizing comments as a form of omniscient narration because people in the real world make such statements all the time, despite their limited point of view (31). Because none of the features mentioned above evokes omniscience by itself, and the term omniscient narration masks their conventional nature, Culler calls for a new set of narratological terms that would set them apart and more accurately reflect their functions in the text.

Dawson intervenes in this debate by arguing that the term, with its evocation of authority, is still useful for contemporary fiction, although in modified form. The major point of departure for Dawson's discussion of omniscience is the question of authorship and its relationship to authority. Dawson claims that the cultural authority of novelists has declined over the years, thus requiring a new projection of authorship:

The figure of authorship associated with the favored narrative voice of modernism, the Flaubertian/Joycean impersonal artist laying bare the psychological interior of characters, today seems a less viable trope than that of the author as an intellectual intervening in contemporary cultural debates. Contemporary omniscient narrators perform this trope most overtly, and one way to understand the difference between classic and contemporary omniscience lies in the different figures of authorship they project, not just as an artist in the literary field, but as an intellectual in the broader public sphere. (14)

Taking the author's status in the public sphere into consideration allows Dawson to differentiate between old and new forms of omniscience. The classic omniscient narrators of the Realist tradition understood themselves primarily as artists who were confined to their fictional worlds. They did not participate in larger public debates, as contemporary omniscient narrators do today by taking on the additional role of the public intellectual, who, according to Dawson, "is able to speak to a general audience on a range of public issues from a base of specific disciplinary expertise" (15). The emergence of contemporary omniscience is not accidental. Dawson argues that it follows from the lack of social consensus and the diminishing status of literature in advanced capitalism. Contemporary novelists react against this perceived lack of authority by creating omniscient narrators who extend their

reach into the public sphere through their intrusive commentary (22). From his study of Anglo-American novels, he identifies the four types of public intellectuals mentioned above. Although Dawson does not include the figure of the editor in his list, Schulze's editor, I argue, performs his narrative authority similarly by means of the intrusive commentary in the footnotes that he appends to Enrico's letters. These footnotes reveal a desire both to write an authoritative account of German reunification and to show the limits of such an undertaking, both of which have made the *Wenderoman* an elusive quest for generations of German writers.⁷

Schulze's Editor as a New Type of Omniscient Narrator

The editor claims for himself the status of a public intellectual by means of the footnotes that he provides for Enrico's letters, although his practice eventually undermines this claim. In the preface to *Neue Leben*, he explains the purpose of the footnotes: "Die Fußnoten sollen die Lektüre erleichtern. Was dem einen oder der anderen überflüssig erscheinen mag, werden gerade jüngere Leser dankbar zur Kenntnis nehmen" (11) 'The footnotes are meant to facilitate the reading experience. What may seem superfluous to some will be greeted with thanks by other, particularly younger, readers' (xii). The editor justifies his interventions on account of younger readers, who, he assumes, have little or no knowledge of the GDR. A careful survey of the 380 footnotes reveals, however, that the editor's interventions are not all the same. While many of the footnotes make the reading of Enrico's letters easier by contextualizing them with extra-textual information, some of the footnotes perform a more critical function. The editor criticizes Enrico's descriptions of events when he cannot crosscheck the details or when he cites sources that contradict Enrico. The problem, of course, is that Enrico is not a public figure, and the letters are not public documents that can be held up to the same criteria of truth as other public records. The editor thus overreaches his authority and compromises his status as a public intellectual when he holds Enrico's descriptions up to the standards of historical inquiry.

The editor performs his role as a public intellectual most convincingly in explanatory footnotes. In these footnotes he addresses his younger readers' presumed lack of knowledge by providing them with extra-textual information they might find in reference books. For example, when Enrico calls Altenburg's towers "Barbarossas Rote Spitzen" (17) 'Barbarossa's Red Tips' (6), the editor feels called upon to explain the meaning of this colloquialism in an early footnote in the novel: "Wahrzeichen von Altenburg. Von dem unter Kaiser Barbarossa gegründeten Kloster sind nur die beiden Ziegeltürme erhalten, die angeblich die roten Bartspitzen des Kaisers symbolisieren sollen" (17) 'Altenburg's hallmark. All that is left of the convent founded during the reign of Kaiser Friedrich Barbarossa are two brick steeples that are said to symbolize the tips of the kaiser's red beard' (6).

The editor unpacks Enrico's shorthand by offering a quick history of the towers that one finds, for example, in a tourist guidebook, such as *Baedeker Reiseführer Thüringen* ('Baedeker Travel Guide Thuringia').⁸ In such footnotes, the editor proves himself reliable in his use of facts to expand the informational content of Enrico's letters.

The editor's assumption that younger readers will not understand GDR references is most strongly borne out in his footnotes commenting on the letters Enrico writes to his West German lover Nicoletta. In one such letter, Enrico explains that his family kept cans that had arrived from West Germany in the basement and cites the popular East German TV show *Willi Schwabes Rumpelkammer* (*Willi Schwabe's Attic*).⁹ "Oft stieg ich in den Keller wie Willi Schwabe in seine Rumpelkammer—sagt Ihnen Willi Schwabe etwas?" (136) 'I would often go down into the cellar just like Willi Schwabe entering his attic—does the name Willi Schwabe mean anything to you?' (92). The editor picks up on Enrico's cue that someone who did not grow up in East Germany will not know who Willi Schwabe is and provides the following footnote: "'Willi Schwabes Rumpelkammer'—DDR-Fernsehsendung. Am Anfang jeder Sendung stieg Willi Schwabe mit einer Laterne in der Hand zu einer Art Dachboden hinauf. Dabei wurde als Melodie 'Tanz der Zuckerfee' aus Tschaikowskis *Der Nussknacker* gespielt" (136) '*Willi Schwabe's Attic*—an East German television program. At the beginning of each episode Willi Schwabe, with lantern in hand, would climb the stairs to a kind of storage room. The background music was the 'Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy' from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*' (92). Interventions like this one provide details of everyday life in East Germany to readers likely ignorant of them. By taking up Enrico's concern that Nicoletta understand him as a child of GDR culture, the editor legitimizes himself as a necessary mediator between the content of Enrico's letters and a contemporary audience.

Sometimes, however, the editor provides more than just the information necessary to understand the immediate context. In the following example, he merely seeks to confirm Enrico's narration of events. In a letter dated January 13, 1990, the editor verifies Enrico's claim that Václav Havel's picture was printed on the front page of *Neues Deutschland* (*New Germany*), the official newspaper of the GDR government: "Václav Havels erste Auslandsreise als Präsident führte ihn in die DDR, dann nach München" (18) 'Václav Havel's first foreign trip as president of Czechoslovakia took him to the GDR, then to Munich' (7). The edition of *Neues Deutschland* that appeared on January 3, 1990 indeed contains a picture of Havel on its front page and an article announcing his visit to West Germany (Reinert and Kalbel 1). Like the previous footnotes, this one contains extra-textual information, but its purpose has changed. It no longer aims to expand but rather to confirm the informational content of Enrico's letters. This is also the case when Enrico explains to Nicoletta that his mother wanted to go to Bavaria after the fall of the Berlin Wall,

“weil dort das Begrüßungsgeld am höchsten sei” (573) ‘because the “welcome money” was highest there’ (411). By using the German subjunctive form of “to be” (*sei*), Enrico only reports his mother’s claim but does not actually confirm it himself. Instead, the editor does it for him in a footnote: “In Bayern betrug das Begrüßungsgeld in der Regel 140 DM statt der sonst üblichen 100 DM” (573) ‘In Bavaria the “welcome money” was normally set at 140 DM, rather than the usual 100 DM’ (411). The editor quotes the actual amount of money that the government distributed to East Germans after reunification, but does not thereby provide readers with additional information; instead, he verifies what is merely alleged in Enrico’s telling.¹⁰ The shift from contextualizing to authenticating Enrico’s letters forces them to take the form of public records. In this way, the editor gives Enrico’s descriptions the imprimatur of verifiable facts.

This approach to Enrico’s letters allows the editor to treat them more critically when they fail to conform to his expectations of verifiability. The editor insinuates in these cases that Enrico cannot be trusted, because his claims cannot be corroborated by any external evidence. For example, in a letter to his friend Johann, Enrico claims that Nicoletta had helped him at the newspaper. The editor’s footnote about Nicoletta’s involvement with the newspaper reads: “Darin muss man wohl eher einen Wunsch oder eine Hoffnung sehen. Es bleibt unklar, was [Enrico] T. damit meinte. Veröffentlichungen von N. H. [Nicoletta] über das ‘Altenburger Wochenblatt’ sind nicht bekannt” (139) ‘This surely must either be a wish or a fond hope. It is quite unclear what [Enrico] T. meant by this. There is no record of anything by N. H. [Nicoletta] ever being published in the *Altenburg Weekly*’ (94). The editor refers to Enrico’s claim as “a wish or fond hope” because he cannot find any evidence of Nicoletta’s contributions to the newspaper in the archives. This conclusion, and his bafflement—“it is quite unclear”—are pretenses. Enrico does not claim that Nicoletta writes for the paper, only that she has done much for it. The editor chooses to look for a particular kind of documentary evidence and then claims that Enrico must be lying when he cannot find it. The expectation that Enrico’s letters can be authenticated by other sources narrows the editor’s ability to read the letters as private documents. This is the beginning of the process whereby the editor undermines his own authority as a public intellectual by confusing the bounds between private and public history.

Not only matters of fact cause the editor to look for external evidence; he also suspects Enrico’s impressions of events to be distorted or false. This leads him to call on fictional rather than extra-textual sources for some of his footnotes, which only further undermines his status as a public intellectual. For instance, in a letter to Johann about a recent performance of Boniface’s Christianization of the Germanic pagans by an amateur theater troupe, Enrico states that the scene in which Boniface fells the Donar oak is very moving: “Als er die Axt unter seinem Gewand hervorholte und emporhielt, erhoben sich Jammern und Wehklagen. Die

Bemühung war dilettantisch, die Wirkung enorm” (644) ‘When he pulled out an ax from under his robe, they lifted their voices in wails of lamentation. Their efforts were amateurish, but the effect was tremendous’ (462). The editor responds to Enrico’s description with the following footnote: “Außer [Enrico] T.s Bericht im *Sonntagsblatt* Nr. 2 und einem eher zusammenfassenden Artikel in *Der Bonifatiusbote* Nr.1 sind keine weiteren schriftlichen Zeugnisse bekannt. Allerdings stimmen die Aussagen der Augenzeugen alle darin überein, dass die Wirkung der Aufführung tatsächlich ‘enorm’ gewesen war” (644) ‘Beyond [Enrico] T.’s own article in the *Sunday Bulletin*, no. 2, and a more general summary in the *Bonifatiusbote* [Boniface Messenger], no. 1, no other written accounts of the episode have been located. Eyewitnesses, however, are unanimous in reporting that the effect of the performance was indeed ‘tremendous’” (462). The purpose of this footnote is not to confirm the reality of the performance but rather Enrico’s experience of it. The editor explicitly questions his credibility as an eyewitness and searches for “other written accounts” that could confirm his write-up. Only after consulting other eyewitnesses does the editor concede that the effect was “indeed ‘tremendous.’” Ironically, the editor calls upon unverifiable eyewitnesses to crosscheck Enrico’s account. This marks a change in his approach to the letters: initially, he was the guarantor of a coherent fictional world that also encompassed historical facts; now, his obsession with Enrico’s unreliability has paradoxically made him an unreliable source.

The editor’s gradual use of fictional sources changes his status within the novel. He no longer stands outside it, providing extra-textual commentary for Enrico’s letters, but instead becomes a competing first-person narrator. In this new role, he uses critical footnotes as a vehicle to convey his version of events. He even draws attention to his own fictionality in a footnote he adds when Enrico writes about his experiences at an October 1989 demonstration in Leipzig calling for more democracy and freedom in East Germany. “Ich zählte zu den ersten, die gingen, und sah, wie klein die Welt der Demonstranten war, wie wenige Schritte ausreichten, um in die vertrauten Kulissen, in das alte liebgewonnene Stück zurückzukehren” (447) ‘I was among the first to leave, and saw how small the world of the demonstrators was, how few strides it took to return to familiar scenery, to the old play of which we had grown so fond’ (319). The editor objects in the footnote:

[Enrico] T. verschweigt hier, wissentlich oder nicht, dass sich die Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Demonstranten und Polizei an diesem Tag noch zuspitzten und gewalttätig endeten. Genauer über die weiteren Ereignisse vgl. *Rabet oder Das Verschwinden einer Himmelsrichtung* von Martin Jankowski, S. 155 ff., wo u.a. beschrieben wird, warum und unter

welchen Umständen später auf ebenjener Demonstration erstmals “Wir sind das Volk” gerufen wurde. (447)

Whether intentionally or not, [Enrico] T. says nothing about the fact that the confrontation between the demonstrators and the police that day came to a head and ended in violence. For a more precise account of what occurred later, cf. Martin Jankowski, *Rabet oder Das Verschwinden einer Himmelsrichtung* [‘Rabet, or the Disappearance of a Cardinal Direction’], p. 155 ff., including, among other things, why and under what circumstances the chant of “We are the people” was first taken up at this same demonstration. (319)

The editor accuses Enrico of withholding information—although he (the editor) leaves open the possibility that it might be unintentional—because Enrico does not provide the full details of the demonstration. The distance that separates Enrico and the editor, and the resources that the latter has at his disposal, provide the editor with a vantage point that allows him to judge Enrico’s descriptions of events against more rigorous standards. This makes it even more curious that the editor does not cite extra-textual information to justify his intervention. Instead, he lists Martin Jankowski’s novel, *Rabet oder Das Verschwinden einer Himmelsrichtung* (1999), as evidence against Enrico’s account. The editor’s choice of material is suggestive. By directing readers to a work of fiction, he ceases to act as a public intellectual and becomes a character—in two of the footnotes literally—offering his own versions of events.¹¹ On the occasions when he questions Enrico’s trustworthiness as a contemporary eyewitness, he calls attention to the typical play of diverse perspectives in the epistolary novel. The initial set-up of the novel, in which the editor plays the omniscient narrator to the main character’s partial viewpoint, is slowly revealed to be a competition between their two perspectives. Because the conflict emerges in the course of the novel rather than being visible from the beginning, the effect is not so much one of postmodern perspectival game-playing (though it is that as well) as of a more fundamental problem: how can we trust either private experience or public expertise to make sense of a complex event like German reunification?

Schulze’s Innovation in the Epistolary Novel Genre

Although the dual role of the editor is built historically into the epistolary novel, Schulze realizes this potential to a far greater degree than any author before him. A survey of some epistolary novels from their high point in the eighteenth century reveals that the function of the editor has been for the most part rather limited.¹² He appeared at the beginning of the novel to introduce the letters; he

occasionally attached footnotes where it was necessary to justify his discretion; and between letters he might explain why some were missing. The editor in these novels could best be described as another character, as Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1748) illustrates. In Richardson's novel, the editor, John Belford, begins as a friend of one of the correspondents, Lovelace, and slowly comes to favor Clarissa above him. After Clarissa dies, her will enjoins Belford to collect the correspondence relating to her story, and his editorship testifies to his belief in her moral superiority over Lovelace. Thus, even though Belford does not overtly weight the scales toward Clarissa in his role as editor, he comes to this role as a participant and partisan in the drama.

The example of Richardson is instructive in one further regard: the editor of the epistolary novel is always operating as a proto-public intellectual, whether he chooses to emphasize this fact, as Rousseau does, or not. Terry Eagleton uses a Gramscian framework in his book *The Rape of Clarissa* (1986) to claim Richardson as an "organic intellectual" (2) of the rising bourgeoisie: he became an author late in life, as a sideline to his primary business as printer and publisher. He used his novels to lay out a vision of morality starkly at odds with the honor codes of the fading aristocracy, as his forthright prefaces attest. In the brief introduction to his novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), Richardson promises that his work will "inculcate Religion and Morality," "give practical Examples," and "paint Vice in its true Colours," among other functions (3). Richardson's example is programmatic for the epistolary novel in the eighteenth century, even for an apparent outlier like Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1774), in which the editor substitutes empathy for Richardson's morality. Schulze takes advantage of this role built into the epistolary novel and styles his editor self-consciously as a public intellectual who wants to share his knowledge of the East German past with presumably ignorant but well-intentioned readers.

In choosing to emphasize the editor's status as a public intellectual, Schulze engages with critiques of inefficiency and contrivance leveled against the epistolary genre in the nineteenth century by Realist critics suspicious of what they saw as its narrative deficiencies. Schulze rehabilitates the epistolary novel after it has been dismissed by Realist critics for its reliance on documents, which they claimed was unwieldy both narratologically and epistemologically. He turns this shortcoming into an advantage by making the editor's relationship to the letters the primary source of narrative interest. Hans Rudolf Picard echoes these critics when he argues that the editorial framing of the epistolary novel is a bad fiction that merely makes opinion and feeling look like fact and action:

eine aufklärerische oder sentimentale Selbstgewißheit beendet die sich in brieflicher Personalperspektive selbst schildernde Empfindsamkeit bzw.

Intellektualität. Der Roman wird zu erzählter Objektivität. Er verzichtet darauf, in naiver Weise der Realität den Rang abzulaufen, wie es der Briefroman tat, der sich mit dem Anspruch dokumentarischer Echtheit zu zieren vorgab. Er gibt sich als bewußt erzähltes Werk. (114)

an enlightening or sentimental self-assurance ends the sentimentality, or intellectuality, which described itself from an epistolary personal perspective. The novel becomes narrated objectivity. It stops naïvely competing with reality like the epistolary novel used to do with its claims of documentary authenticity. The novel presents itself as a self-consciously narrated work.¹³

The fiction that the letters were real, and that the correspondents were merely recording what had happened and how they had felt, is no longer tenable when the Realist novel comes into its own at the end of the eighteenth century. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Picard and, more recently, Catherine Gallagher, suggest that the reason for the decline of the epistolary novel and rise of the Realist novel had to do with a fundamental change in readers' understanding of the relationship between reality and fiction.¹⁴ Whereas the letters in the epistolary novel were meant to appear as copies of existing reality, the Realist novel constitutes its fiction as reality. The resulting shift in understanding fictionality made the epistolary novel appear noticeably contrived and inefficient for two linked reasons: 1) letters provide a subjective perspective, so readers cannot be sure of the accuracy of their descriptions, unless 2) the editor provides multiple letters about the same event, a proceeding which in its turn is unwieldy. Schulze overcomes these charges of inefficiency and contrivance by experimenting with new forms of omniscient narration.

As Dawson has argued, the contemporary omniscient narrator performs his authority by framing the fictional world through extra-textual discourse. The interweaving of extra-textual commentary into the fictional world in the explanatory footnotes allows Schulze to circumvent the two deficiencies of the epistolary novel. The editor sidesteps the need for a large cast of characters by simply including factual content in the footnotes. In traditional epistolary novels, multiple characters share their perspectives on the same event, thereby achieving the effect of objective clarity. The use of explanatory footnotes considerably simplifies this narrative inefficiency. Furthermore, the extra-textual content of the footnotes grounds the pretense of the found documents in a shared reality. Although Enrico and his correspondents are fictional and thus the editor's fiction is guilty of the same metaphysical trappings as the classical epistolary novel, the framing is interwoven with historically verifiable references. Schulze thus avoids the contrivance of the epistolary genre by shifting the focus away from the letters to

the footnotes. The editor's frequent interventions confront readers with factual references to the GDR and prevent their absorption into the fictional world.

Whereas Schulze manages the inefficiencies and contrivance of Enrico's letters in his editor's explanatory footnotes, he reintroduces them in the critical footnotes. The multiple perspectives and documentary pretense reappear in these critical footnotes because the editor no longer provides extra-textual information, instead seeking to confirm or undermine Enrico's account of events. In the critical footnotes, the editor is unable to remain outside the fictional world and becomes another character in the novel. His status as an omniscient narrator depends on his mediation between the novel's fictional and extra-textual discourse; but when the editor corrects Enrico's version of events, he relies on intra-fictional sources, including his own experience. These accounts are obviously not verifiable in the same way as the facts he provides about the GDR. The editor can perform his authority only in the public sphere; his attempt to do the same in the private sphere arouses his readers' suspicion—not only that Enrico is not telling the whole truth, but also that the editor is too zealous in exposing Enrico as an unreliable narrator. Perhaps this explains the critics' reactions to the editor's footnotes, because certainly the charge of “geschwätzig-gehässig,” ‘chatty-catty,’ which Christine Cosentino makes, applies to personal rather than public matters.¹⁵ The editor's ambivalent relationship to the letters he glosses is symptomatic of his status in the fictional world. In the explanatory footnotes, he appears as the expert public intellectual, while in the critical footnotes, he appears as a second (antagonistic) character. The figure of the editor thus embodies both the contemporary trend toward using omniscient narration and the limits of this narrative style.¹⁶

Rethinking the *Wenderoman*

Schulze's editor's performance of omniscience transcends purely narratological concerns and intervenes in the debates about the so-called *Wenderoman*. Despite his dual role, the editor pursues but one goal, namely, to relate the unified history of the end of the GDR. In his role as a public intellectual, he situates Enrico's letters in official accounts of German reunification. When the letters fail to align with his expectations, however, he slides into the fictional world and offers his own version of events. The editor's movement between the fictional and extra-textual discourse points to the conclusion that the inevitable pettiness of personal experience has frustrated large-scale understandings of German reunification. Enrico's letters were never meant to be representative of the events preceding and following the fall of the Berlin Wall; nevertheless, the editor presses them into service as historical documents that testify to the current consensus of what those events meant. By highlighting the disjunction between Enrico's original intentions and the editor's use of his letters, Schulze tries to end the interminable

discussion of the *Wenderoman* by writing one that brings to light the processes that have obstructed its realization.

Schulze uses the editor's questionable performance as a public intellectual in *Neue Leben* to critique the desire for omniscience in the historical reconstruction of German reunification. Enrico's letters, in their mix of present-day concerns and the story of his life, are indeed a private allegory of this time, although Schulze is subtle enough to avoid the banal signposts of November 9, 1989 and October 3, 1990. The editor is not wrong to read the letters as a novel or to see the parallel they trace to the events of German reunification. As a reader, he has every right to do so, and the letters themselves make a compelling case for him. He is, however, wrong to comment on them as he does, so that he might make his preferred narrative the predetermined conclusion of his retrospective omniscience. The result of Schulze's authorial critique is to uphold the editor's work as a reader, but not as a narrator, and more broadly, to claim, contentiously, that German reunification can only be read, never told.

The editor's role as a public intellectual explains Schulze's otherwise puzzling decision to write a *Wenderoman* as an epistolary novel in 2005. While Anglo-American novelists, according to Dawson, focus on reclaiming their lost cultural capital through omniscient narration, Schulze uses it to address more overtly political matters. The competing perspectives that emerge between his editor and Enrico raise questions about authorship in a broad sense: who has the right to tell the history or histories of the GDR, its end, and reunification with West Germany?

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Notes

1. Yvonne Pietsch's brief analysis of the editor's footnotes focuses on the editor as a Romantic figure, without taking into account how he narrates through the footnotes.

2. See the letters from May 26 and June 16 in Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1774) for an example of an editor using footnotes to justify his discretion. For an example of an editor using insertions between letters (rather than footnotes) to explain missing links in the correspondence, see the end of Letter XXXI in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740). Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761) is a notable exception to the sparing use of footnotes in these other novels. Here, the editor intervenes frequently, adding 163 footnotes, and performs some of the same functions as Schulze's editor. Space does not permit me to compare these works in greater detail.

3. See Grabbe, Sieg, Cosentino, and Ledanff, for example. For more general discussions of *Neue Leben*, see Lutz, Plowman, and Twark.

4. My translation.

5. See Eagleton 7.

6. My suspicion is that he is right, because he would have to discuss God's relationship to the world, as broadly outlined by theism and deism. See Smart 8.

7. See Frank Thomas Grub for a comprehensive discussion of the debates surrounding the *Wenderoman* and its failure to materialize immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

8. In the *Baedeker Reiseführer Thüringen*, Stahn gives the following description of the Altenburg towers, which is very similar to the one that the editor gives: "Die sogenannten Roten Spitzen sind das Wahrzeichen der Stadt . . . Kaiser Friedrich I. Barbarossa, Stifter des Klosters, soll bei der Einweihung der Kirche 1172 zugegen gewesen sein und sein roter Bart als Vorbild für die Farbgebung gedient haben" (130) 'The so-called Red Tips are the hallmark of the city . . . Frederick I, Holy Roman Emperor, the founder of the convent, was supposedly present at the inauguration of the church in 1172 and his beard served as the basis for the color selected for the towers' (My translation).

9. See Müller-Enbergs for a description of this TV show.

10. For more information about the "welcome money," see Hosfeld.

11. In the German edition, see the footnotes on pp. 206 and 315. In the English translation, see pp. 143 and 224.

12. See Altman, Black, and Beebee for an overview of the epistolary novel.
13. My translation.
14. See Gallagher 345-46.
15. My translation.
16. See Breger for a comparable reading of omniscient narration in another novel about German reunification, Uwe Tellkamp's *Der Turm* (*The Tower*, 2008).

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