

Literary Ink in the Veins of God: Misotheism, Atheism or Eutheism

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Abstract

This paper investigates one of those key decision points in post-war German society, which has only been superficially explored until now. The changing concept of God in the *Trümmerliteratur* of Germany's post-war literary revival led the way for a re-examination by many Germans of their religious beliefs and whether it was even worthwhile to give the possible existence of a God a second thought. They reconsidered whether a faith in a "Märchenbuchliebergott"¹ as coined by Wolfgang Borchert, was still a tenable model for post-war German society. Central to the paper are the literary works of Borchert, who, with a slim published oeuvre, investigates the many different facets of God through his war time experiences and the consequences he faced upon his return home. This paper demonstrates that Borchert comes to the conclusion that the concept of God gives humans a convenient excuse for their brutality, while the real God is ineffable and can only be found in the act of searching; a deistic vision of God that rejects the revelations of religion and theology. These discussions have lain dormant since the early 1950s, as Germany's *Wirtschaftswunder* emerged from the rubble. However, in recent years, Germans born after the war have begun to re-evaluate the literature of the period and in particular that of Borchert as a necessary balm that allowed them to heal from the trauma of the war.

Introduction

After the trauma of defeat and the destruction of its cities, Germany stood at more than one crossroad. The German survivors of the Second World War reconsidered whether a simplistic faith in an eutheistic "Märchenbuchliebergott" was still a tenable model for post-war German religious life. The discussion was pulled out of the private sphere when Wolfgang Borchert demanded an answer from God regarding his apparent silence during the horrors of the Second World War at the end of *Draußen vor der Tür*, Borchert's one published play, which still ranks as the most performed post-war play in Germany.

Borchert, with a slim published oeuvre, investigates the many facets of God through his wartime experiences and the consequences he faced upon his return to his home in Hamburg. As such, Borchert's literary production will occupy a central position in this paper. An explication of his literary treatment of God and theological concepts will demonstrate that Borchert came to the conclusion that the traditional concepts of a loving God gives humans a convenient excuse for their brutality. Moreover, it will argue that the God concept that Borchert establishes is ineffable and can only be found in the act of searching; a deistic, panentheistic vision of God that rejects the revelations of religion and theology.

Rethinking Borchert's Theology

Until relatively recently, Borchert's *Draußen vor der Tür*, short stories, and poetry have remained firmly anchored in the literary classification of *Trümmerliteratur*, a term that most often ensures that it is regarded as being of little import to the modern reader. It is only recently that scholars, such as Alexander Koller, have begun to free Borchert's works from being interpreted from within the confines a single historical context and consider whether their meaning and impact transcend the time and place of their creation. It is with this fresh perspective that Borchert's God concept will be investigated.

¹ Wolfgang Borchert, *Draußen vor der Tür*, in *Das Gesamtwerk* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1949), 149. Author's translation: "The loving God of fairy-tales."

Peter Rühmkorf,² Karl Migner,³ Hans Popper,⁴ Evelyn Albinson,⁵ Sydney Krome,⁶ Bernhard Balzer,⁷ and Claus Schröder⁸ use Borchert's purported atheism as a starting point for their interpretation of the various God-figures in Borchert's works. However, this supposition is not based on any clear statement found in Borchert's works that declares his atheism, but on the assertion that Borchert represents a nihilistic world view expressed in an introductory statement often associated with his play: "Eine Injektion Nihilismus bewirkt oft, daß man aus lauter Angst wieder Mut zum Leben bekommt,"⁹ which was stricken from the later printed version. This line is then associated with the dialogue in *Draußen vor der Tür* between the old God, represented by a pathetic old man on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and the purported new God, Death, personified as a gluttonous mortician. Here the old God declares Death to be the new God in whom everyone now believes, suggesting that the theology in Borchert's works is a form of dystheism, maltheism, or cacodaemonism. This was interpreted as evidence of Borchert's atheism, ignoring indications to the contrary in the texts.

While most of the early scholarship posits a God concept that argues for an atheistic reading of Borchert's works, it is undermined by the very fact that Borchert includes God as a character in many of his works, even if one could argue that this God is simply a human construct. Louise Woodard goes so far as to suggest that Borchert allowed for the existence of God, but that Borchert was an antitheist.¹⁰ This position is related to Sydney Krome's suggestion that, if Borchert did indeed allow for the existence of a God, then it was quite possible that God was maltheistic or at best deistic in nature.

More recent scholarship suggests that the God figures are either Jungian archetypes, as in Kurt Fickert's interpretation,¹¹ or simply allegorical figures as suggested by Alexander Koller¹² and Gordon Burgess.¹³ This approach allows for the existence of God as a narrative device without a consistent portrayal of God. Each is essentially a "one-off" that cannot be understood in relation to the other occurrences within Borchert's complete works. In this way they are able to avoid a systematic exposition of how the various God figures relate to one another.

While the majority of scholarship suggests Borchert used his allusions to God to bolster his supposed atheism, there are a few who have countered with theories that allow for Borchert's belief in a God. As already noted above, Krome allows for deism as an explanation for the silence of Borchert's God, a position that is supported by Albrecht Weber¹⁴ and Hans Popper. This, however, is challenged by the fact that the human characters in both *Draußen vor der Tür* and the short stories are able to enter into a pseudo dialogue with God, or the figures that represent God, though they may, or may not, know they are in conversation with God. That is, an actual dialogue, not one where the characters simply talk past

² Peter Rühmkorf, *Wolfgang Borchert in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*. rororo Bildmonographien (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1962).

³ Karl Migner, "Das Drama *Draußen vor der Tür*," in *Interpretationen zu Wolfgang Borchert*, ed. Rupert Hirschenauer and Albrecht Weber (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1962).

⁴ Hans Popper, "Wolfgang Borchert," *German Men of Letters* 3 (1964): 269-303.

⁵ Evelyn A. Albinson, "Georg Büchner and Wolfgang Borchert. A Comparative Study," (Minnesota: Ph.D. Thesis, 1967).

⁶ Sydney A. Krome, "A Translation of *Die traurigen Geranien und andere Geschichten aus dem Nachlaß* by Wolfgang Borchert, with a Critical Introduction," (Maryland: Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maryland, 1970).

⁷ Balzer, Bernhard. *Wolfgang Borchert. "Draußen vor der Tür"* Frankfurt am Main: Moritz Diesterweg Verlag, 1983.

⁸ Claus B. Schroeder, *Wolfgang Borchert* (Hamburg: Ernst Kabel Verlag GmbH, 1985).

⁹ Author's Translation: "An injection of nihilism often has the effect that, out of sheer terror, one once more finds the will to live."

¹⁰ Louise P. Woodward, "Beckmann: The Existential Outsider in Wolfgang Borchert's *Draußen vor der Tür*" (University of Vermont: M.A. Thesis, 1978).

¹¹ Kurt J. Fickert, *Signs and Portents: Myth in the Work of Wolfgang Borchert* (Fredericton N.B.: York Press, 1980).

¹² Alexander Koller, *Wolfgang Borcherts "Draußen vor der Tür"* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2000).

¹³ Gordon Burgess, *The Life and Works of Wolfgang Borchert* (Rochester: Camden House, 2003).

¹⁴ Albrecht Weber, "Die drei dunklen Könige," in *Interpretationen zu Wolfgang Borchert*, ed. Rupert Hirschenauer and Albrecht Weber (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1962), 97-108.

one another, takes place when the human character is not aware that he is in conversation with God, who has taken human form.

In spite of the fact that most early scholars took the view that Borchert was writing from a negative viewpoint, there was a small group of critics that interpreted Borchert's God as positive. Bernhard Meyer-Marwitz,¹⁵ Helmut Christmann,¹⁶ and Robert Pichl¹⁷ have suggested that Borchert's God offers hope to those who experience Him with childlike faith. This, however, is problematic in that their interpretations limit themselves to a single short story and do not offer a comprehensive explanation of Borchert's theology.

There is one further possible approach to Borchert's God that allows for a silent God, but not one that is as detached as that found in deism. James Stark concentrated his research on the social environment from which Borchert's works emerged. Though he limits himself to a single short story, "Die Hundebblume," he does offer a unique perspective that is helpful when applied more broadly. Stark suggests that Borchert's God is to be found within the life which surrounds and permeates the individual. He further maintains that Borchert redefines God, "[as] a life force under the control of that which is living."¹⁸ a sentiment that is echoed by Olivia Gabor.¹⁹ In coming to this conclusion, Stark suggests that the God-concept found in Borchert's works is an expression of humanity's own highest aspirations. One is also left to ponder the question of whether what Borchert is doing is developing a panentheistic vision of God along the lines suggested by Charles Hartshorne.²⁰

A Re-evaluation of Borchert's God

The discussions related to the nature of Borchert's God have lain dormant in Germany's literary discourse, with the occasional reiteration of the conclusions reached in the early deliberations of Borchert's literary significance. However, in recent years, Germans born after the war have begun to re-evaluate the literature of the period and in particular the notion that Borchert's works as a necessary balm that allowed the survivors of the war to heal from its trauma.

Borchert has been labelled the spokesman of the "lost generation," because he articulated the emotions of a generation that, for the most part, was unable to fully elucidate its circumstances. A generation that found itself in the midst of death, destruction, and hopelessness. This designation, though well-intended and meant as a tribute, carries with it the stigma of a writer whose works are fixed in time and space, unable to be relevant beyond its immediate temporal and spatial surroundings.

Though Borchert cannot be considered a minor post-World War II German author, the fact that his works are associated with what is sometimes derisively labelled *Trümmerliteratur*²¹ has led many literary scholars in Germany to conclude that his work is one dimensional, simplistic, and unworthy of more than superficial analysis. An additional difficulty is that Borchert's only published play, *Draußen vor der Tür*, an expressionistic *Stationendrama* that depicts the dying hallucinations of a guilt-obsessed soldier, and a few of his other short stories have been adopted by Germany's educational system as the quintessential works that sum up the literary milieu of post-war Germany. This has left the impression

¹⁵ Bernhard Meyer-Marwitz, *Wolfgang Borchert*. Hamburg: Hamburgische Bücherei, 1948.

¹⁶ Christmann, Helmut. "'Nachts schlafen die Ratten doch.'" in *Interpretationen zu Wolfgang Borchert*, ed. Rupert Hirschenauer and Albrecht Weber (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1962), 76-82.

¹⁷ Robert Pichl, "Das Bild des Kindes in Wolfgang Borchert," in Wolff, Rudolf, ed. *Wolfgang Borchert: Werk und Wirkung*, ed. Rudolf Wolff (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1984), 114-22.

¹⁸ James L. Stark, "Wolfgang Borchert and the Third Reich," (Washington: D.A. Thesis, University of Washington, 1972), 62.

¹⁹ Olivia G. Gabor, *The Stage as "Der Spielraum Gottes"* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006).

²⁰ Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Hamden Conn.: Archon Books, 1964), 348.

²¹ Literally translated as "rubble literature," it refers to the literature created immediately after the end of WWII in Germany and is descriptive of the physical state of Germany's cities during this period.

that Borchert's material is easily understood and best suited for didactic purposes rather than serious literary analysis.

These conclusions, however, are misleading when viewed from the perspective of those coming to grips with German religious life and theology in the shadow of Auschwitz and the deaths of millions of people at the front, at home, and in the death camps.

If one views Borchert as a spokesman for his generation only, one could easily conclude that his works are no longer relevant today. However, Borchert did not intend his writing to be simply documentary of his times. In his first manifesto, "Das ist unser Manifest," he indicates that he is addressing his own generation when he uses the first person plural throughout. However, in his last work, "Dann gibt es nur eins!" written about one month before his death, he exclusively uses the second person singular and plural, indicating that he has moved beyond matters concerning only himself and his own generation.

In addressing future generations, Borchert outlines the essence of the betrayal his generation suffered at hands of their forbearers. This becomes apparent in his third manifesto "Generation ohne Abschied":

Aber sie gaben uns keinen Gott mit, der unser Herz hätte halten können, wenn die Winde dieser Welt es umwirbelten. So sind wir die Generation ohne Gott, denn wir sind die Generation ohne Bindung, ohne Vergangenheit, ohne Anerkennung.²²

Borchert's analysis of the catastrophe of his times is unconventional. He almost entirely ignores Germany's war and politics and blames a deep psychological and spiritual malady that permeated the soul of the previous generation, the generation that asked him to fight and die for a culture that was bankrupt of any redeeming qualities that pointed to a peaceful future. Moreover, for Borchert, the problem more precisely lies with the lack of a situationally relevant God, not in the absence of a God who simply conforms to the wishes of the individual.

While recent scholarship has largely ignored Borchert's God construct, the theologians and religious community has embraced it. Without having explicitly expressed it in these terms, for the theologians, pastors, and priests, Borchert undertook a search for God after Auschwitz.

The tenability of God after the Holocaust, or at least the way in which God was conceived of before the death camps, has been a long, lively debate that has included such notable theologians from various religious traditions as Jürgen Moltmann, Hans Küng, Dorothee Sölle, Meik Gerhards, Jan Bauke-Ruegg, and Hans Jonas, all of whose writings have either explicitly or implicitly dealt with the literary God presented by Borchert. The only difference between Borchert and those he is often cast in with, is that Borchert was not a theologian and would have rejected any notion that what he was doing could in any way be considered theology. He was a writer of fiction and *Heimkehrer*,²³ who found no benefit in searching for an unknowable, ineffable being through reason and logic. Rather, he was pursuing and trying to express God through poetry, plays, and short stories, a God that went beyond the sterile environment of academic debate and niceties and addressed the ordinary person in the audience, or listening to the radio, or reading one of his stories, unencumbered by the rules of theological debate.

The Genesis of Borchert's God

Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy was highly regarded by Borchert.²⁴ His personal library contained a number of Nietzsche's works, with his copy of *Also sprach Zarathustra* having been thoroughly marked

²² Borchert 1949, 59. Author's Translation: "But they provided us with no God, who could capture our hearts, when the winds of the world engulfed us. Thus, we are the generation without God, for we are the Generation without commitment, without a past, without recognition."

²³ *Heimkehrer* can be literally translated as "one who returns home." However, the most common reference during the post-war period in Germany was to a soldier, who had been away home at the front and had most likely been a prisoner of war and was now returning to his home.

²⁴ Rühmkorf, 27.

up with his marginal notes. It is thus possible to presume that Nietzsche's concept of God would have been echoed by Borchert in some way. This, however, is not to say that Borchert accepted everything that Nietzsche had to say on God, but rather, Borchert would have adopted those thoughts that struck a positive chord with him, and reacted by blocking out those thoughts he may have disagreed with--as is the case with Nietzsche's infamous assertion that "God is dead." At the very most, Borchert might have said that God is very close to being dead. Moreover, his understanding of Nietzsche would now have been filtered through the experience of the destruction wrought by the Second World War. In respect to Borchert's God-concept, all of Nietzsche's works should be considered, but special emphasis must be given to *Also sprach Zarathustra*, because it has been identified as a work that Borchert definitely read and on which he commented.²⁵

Nietzsche's and Borchert's works share certain similarities. One of the most striking is the fact that both "philosophized with a hammer,"²⁶ that is they both set out to smash the graven images created by man—Nietzsche through his philosophical writings and Borchert through his literary achievements. Neither of the two had time for grandiloquence, and the reader is often taken aback by the brute force of their words. This may be seen in the rapier like thrusts of Nietzsche's aphorisms, and is apparent in Borchert's uncomplicated sentence structure which drives his point home without the frills of excess stylistic or ostentatious adjectives and dependent clauses. Borchert, in "Das ist unser Manifest" clarifies what his approach to writing is when he announces,

Wir brauchen keine Stilleben mehr. Unser Leben ist laut.
Wir brauchen keine Dichter mit guter Grammatik. Zu guter Grammatik fehlt uns
Geduld. Wir brauchen die mit dem heißen heiser geschluchzten Gefühl. Die zu Baum
Baum und zu Weib Weib sagen und ja sagen und nein sagen: laut und deutlich und
dreifach und ohne Konjunktiv.²⁷

This passage outlines the principles Borchert used in developing his concept of God. God was to be stripped down to His barest meaning; that is, Borchert endeavoured to distil God into His simplest form. In part, this would explain why Borchert presented God in such a grotesque manner in his early works. In an attempt to find God in His purest form, Borchert finds it necessary to reveal those attributes of God as the highest ideal of human thought, which are incompatible with God the Supreme Being.

In considering the question of Borchert's mirroring, or rejecting, some of the notions that surround Nietzsche's concept of God, it is necessary to sketch out Nietzsche's position in regard to God.

In numerous passages Nietzsche claims that God is dead, but in almost the same breath he will refer to the shadow of God, who still exists, or allude to a God who is in the process of coming.²⁸ Reinhard Margreiter in his introduction to *Ontologie und Gottesbegriffe bei Nietzsche* has attempted to make some sense out of these apparent contradictions.²⁹ In it, he states that Nietzsche may have been using the term *Gott* and *Götter* as a metaphor, rather than the mythological/religious figure to which most are accustomed.³⁰ Margreiter even goes so far as to say that Nietzsche may have been referring to something completely different when he wrote *Gott*.³¹ To some extent Margreiter's explanation of Nietzsche's use of the term *Gott* is helpful in an investigation of Borchert's God. It highlights the fact that the term God

²⁵ Popper, 269.

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bände*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1954), 939. All of the works by Nietzsche quoted in this paper are taken from the Karl Schlechta edition.

²⁷ "We no longer require any still-lives. Our life is loud. We no longer require and poets with good grammar. We don't have the patience for good grammar. We need those who drip with hot sobbing emotion. Those who call a tree a tree and a woman a woman and who say yes and no: loudly and clearly and three times over and without subjunctive."

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 115

²⁹ Reinhard Margreiter, *Ontologie und Gottesbegriffe bei Nietzsche* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1978). i-iv.

³⁰ Margreiter, iii-iv.

³¹ Margreiter, iv.

need not necessarily refer to that which is considered to be the highest being, but that it may be used as a metaphor representing something else. For example, Nietzsche has Zarathustra say “Gott ist ein Gedanke” indicating that the concept “God” is a human invention,³² which is echoed in various other passages in Nietzsche’s works. It is at this point that Nietzsche’s and Borchert’s concept of God make first contact, because Borchert attacks the human manufacture of God when he writes, “Hat auch Gott Theologie studiert?”³³ However, Borchert does not overtly contest the view that a higher being exists, as Nietzsche may have done. It becomes clear that it is the God of human invention that is coming under fire from Borchert. Thus it is imperative that the God that both Nietzsche and Borchert are denying be seen as the God that was created by the theologians and religion, that is, man’s highest thought, rather than the highest being. In fact, Wilhelm Weischedel goes so far as to say, that Nietzsche was actually talking about the death of religion, and not the death of God, in which case man could then find his way back to God unencumbered by religion.³⁴

The next parallel is that of more than one god being depicted in the works of Nietzsche and Borchert. We may accept Margreiter’s view that Nietzsche was dealing with more than one concept of God. But is this also the case in Borchert’s works? This question may be answered by examining the apparent contradictions in Nietzsche and Borchert concerning God.

As already stated, Nietzsche appeared to contradict himself in his position towards the existence of God. Although God was dead, he continued to exist as a shadow (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Werke 115).³⁵ The same contradiction finds its way into the works of Borchert. However, he not only contradicts himself in sometimes denying and sometimes affirming the existence of God, but in the inconsistency of the God he presents. This contradiction may be seen when one compares the God of *Draußen vor der Tür* with that of “Nachts schlafen die Ratten doch” or “Die drei dunkeln Könige.”

The above comparison delineates a general similarity between Borchert’s and Nietzsche’s presentation of God in their works. There are, however, direct parallels in their treatment of God. The first of these correlations is that of *Gott der Gefängniswärter*.³⁶ Nietzsche, in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, relates a parable about prisoners who are about to begin their work in the prison yard when they realize that their guard is missing, and presume that he is dead (914-15 #84). As they discuss where he might be, one of the prisoners claims that he is the son of the prison guard, and that if they believe in him they will be saved. Borchert also employs the figure of the prison guard in his short story “Ein Sonntagmorgen” (*Die traurigen Geranien* 84-94) where he gives the guard the stature of a god when he listens to the petitions of the prisoners in his cell block every Sunday morning. Although Nietzsche’s guard is presumed dead and Borchert’s is clearly alive, the similarity between the two characters is striking. God, the prison guard, is in a position of power over men, with ability to grant their petitions.³⁷

Borchert employs the figure of a guard again in a later short story, “Preußens Gloria.”³⁸ However, in this second story the guard – God – becomes a tragic figure when he commits suicide. In “Preußens Gloria” a guard is put in charge of keeping watch over a warehouse. As he marches back and forth to the tempo of the music, thieves burglarize the premises. At the trial, the guard is accused and convicted of having either committed the crime, or at the very least complicity in the crime, while the actual criminals watch from the gallery. When the guard, having failed in his duty, and having been thoroughly

³² Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, 344.

³³ Borchert, 1949, 149. Author’s Translation: “Has even God studied theology?”

³⁴ Wilhelm Weischedel, *Der Gott der Philosophen: Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theologie im Zeitalter des Nihilismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), 457.

³⁵ Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 115

³⁶ “God the prison guard.”

³⁷ One could also draw a parallel between Borchert’s prison guard and Kafka’s *Türhüter*. Although it is likely that Borchert may have read Kafka, there does not appear to be any concrete evidence at this time to support his having read any of his works.

³⁸ Wolfgang Borchert. *Die traurigen Geranien und andere Geschichten aus dem Nachlaß*, ed. Peter Rühmkorf (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1962), 77-83.

discredited, takes his life, there is no mistaking that the blame for his death falls on the shoulders of humanity.

In “Preußens Gloria” one finds that Borchert amalgamates two different thoughts that Nietzsche deals with concerning God, the first being the already mentioned figure of God as a guard, the second being the death of God itself. On this second theme Nietzsche is quite clear, and he repeats himself on more than one occasion, when he states that God has not gone missing and is not in hiding, but has been murdered by humanity.³⁹

Borchert borrows the idea that humanity is the murderer of God, but does so subtly when he writes at the end of “Preußens Gloria”:

Er sah zwei grinsende Gesichter. Er sah einen Gerichtssaal, der bis an den Rand voll Menschen war. Und die beiden Gesichter grinnten. Und dann grinste der ganze Gerichtssaal. Preußens Gloria, sagte er leise, Preußens Gloria. Und die ganze Stadt ist dabei.⁴⁰

Having come to the realization that he has become the scapegoat for the entire population of the city, the guard returns home and commits suicide. In the above two passages one sees the correlation between Borchert and Nietzsche. Here Borchert echoes Nietzsche's conclusion that man is responsible for the death of God. Borchert's passage, however, makes one further point. Whereas in Nietzsche, the reader is left to speculate to some extent about who is to blame for God's failure in fulfilling humanity's expectations, Borchert apportions the blame to man, because it is man who has created the conditions for God's failure. It is humanity that sets the parameters within which God must operate: just as the guard marches back and forth to the music, so God marches to man's tune. Man knows where God's weaknesses lie, because man has created them, and thus can blame God for the crimes that he himself commits.

A second parallel, using the above passage from *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, may be seen when one compares it to Beckmann's tirade against God in *Draußen vor der Tür*. In it, Beckmann, who is an allegory for Christ in this instance, vents his anger rather than his derision at God:

Oh, wir haben dich gesucht, Gott, in jeder Ruine, in jedem Granattrichter, in jeder Nacht. Wir haben dich gerufen. Gott! Wir haben nach dir gebrüllt, geweint, geflucht! Wo warst du da, lieber Gott? Wo bist du heute abend? Hast du dich von uns gewandt? Hast du dich ganz in deine schönen alten Kirchen eingemauert, Gott? Hörst du unser Geschrei nicht durch die zerklüfteten Fenster, Gott? Wo bist du?⁴¹

Both Nietzsche and Borchert question whether God has abandoned man. However, neither Nietzsche nor Borchert appear to be satisfied with God's desertion, so they look for other explanations for His absence. For Nietzsche it is a rather simple matter; God is dead and thus cannot answer man's call. Borchert, however, does not give in to such a simplistic rationalization. God in *Draußen vor der Tür*, points out that it is man who has turned his back on Him. He states:

“Meine Kinder haben sich von mir gewandt, nicht ich von ihnen. Ihr von mir, ihr von mir. Ich bin der Gott, an den keiner mehr glaubt. Ihr habt euch von mir gewandt.”⁴²

³⁹ Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 126-27; and *Also sprach Zarathustra*, 502

⁴⁰ Borchert, 1962, 82-83. Author's Translation: “He saw two grinning faces. He saw a courtroom that was filled to the rafters with people. And the pair of grinning faces. And then the entire courtroom grinned. Prussia's Glory, he said quietly, Prussia's Glory. And the entire city is in on it.” *Preußens Gloria* is a march written by Johann Piefke in celebration of Prussia's victory in the Franco-Prussian War and the unification of Germany.

⁴¹ Borchert, 1949, 149. Author's Translation: “Oh, we searched for you, God, in every ruin, in every bomb crater, in every night. We called you. God! We screamed, cried, cursed for you! Where were you then, dear God? Where are you this evening? Have you turned away from us? Have you completely walled yourself off from us in your beautiful old churches, God? Don't you hear our screaming through the shattered window, God? Where are you?”

⁴² Borchert, 1949, 149. Author's Translation: “My children have turned their backs on me, I not on them. You from me, not I from you. I am the God in whom no one believes anymore. You have turned away from me.”

It is God who has been abandoned and not God who has deserted humanity.

The death of God may be noted in other Borchert works, such as “Die Kegelbahn” and “Jesus macht nicht mehr mit.” Although one might argue that this motif at the time was so wide spread that it could have been taken from almost anywhere, Borchert's familiarity with Nietzsche's works indicates it as the most likely source. While Borchert only uses the death of God motif explicitly in the one story “Preußens Gloria,” its echoes are strongly felt in “Jesus macht nicht mehr mit.”⁴³ Here God does not die, but a soldier nicknamed Jesus has the task of lying down in freshly blasted graves, to ensure they are the right size for their future occupants. “Jesus,” however, refuses to carry out his assigned duty, and is placed on report by the officer in charge for declining to perform the grim assignment. One, thus, observes how Borchert has put a new spin on Nietzsche's motif of the death of God. Where Nietzsche has God dying, seemingly without much of a struggle, controlled by the thoughts of man, Borchert speculates on the possibility of God having a mind of His own, shown in his refusal to die for men. This would appear to fly in the face of traditional Christian theology which paints a picture of God who purposely sacrifices Himself for mankind. But for Borchert, God appears to have realized the unworthiness of humanity, refusing to live up to man-made expectations.

In the play *Draußen vor der Tür* Borchert once again plays with the idea of the death of God, but again does not go as far as Nietzsche who declares Him totally dead. In *Draußen vor der Tür*, God – that is the conventional God – has been shut out of society, and is left standing before the door just as Borchert's *Heimkehrer*, Beckmann, is refused re-entry to society. God and Beckmann are left in limbo, suspended in a dream world which exists between life and death. God is thus dead to the human world, even though He continues to exist in another. Beckmann then offers God the advice that he should go and hide to avoid being blamed for the world's catastrophes (*Das Gesamtwerk* 150).⁴⁴

A motif closely related to the death of God, is that of God being the counter-concept to life. Again, one finds allusions to this thought throughout Nietzsche's work; however, Nietzsche only clarifies his position in *Götzen-Dämmerung* and in *Ecce Homo: Wie man wird, was man ist* where Nietzsche considers a follower of God to be the ideal eunuch, that is, the believer's will has been surgically removed, and his life ended where the “kingdom of God begins.” This thought is echoed in *Ecce Homo* where Nietzsche likens the concept of God to the negation of life.⁴⁵

Borchert does not accept this Nietzschean view, but rather than simply ignore it, he reacts to it. In *Draußen vor der Tür*, he juxtaposes Death (the new God) with God (the old man) leaving Beckmann trapped between the two, thus giving God a dystheistic dual nature, rather than one which is simply evil or good. Borchert is also unwilling to ascribe fully the role of life to the old God, so he introduces a third character into the mix which is *der Andere* (The Other). *Der Andere* represents Beckmann's will to live and a possible third candidate for the role of God in Beckmann's life, one that would allow Beckmann to carry on in the face of the horrors that confront him.⁴⁶ *Der Andere* urges Beckmann to strive for a third option, which is a life beyond that represented by the old God and Death. He advocates leaving the past behind, thus permitting a reintegration into human society for Beckmann, and possibly permitting a new role in conjunction with mankind for God Himself.

Another of Borchert's borrowings from Nietzsche is the image of God as an old man. Nietzsche in his works continually refers to “der alte Gott,” using the term *alt* to refer to the God of past ages.⁴⁷ Although Borchert does not wish to place God's existence exclusively in the past as Nietzsche appears to, a correlation may still be found between Nietzsche's *alter Gott* and Borchert's old man. What Borchert succeeds in doing is blending Nietzsche's “alter Gott” with the image of the wise old man who watches over the world as found in the prevalent mythology of religion.

⁴³ Borchert, 1949, 178-181.

⁴⁴ Borchert, 1949, 150.

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Götzen-dämmerung*, 968; *Ecce Homo*, 1159.

⁴⁶ Migner, 36-37.

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Werke* vol. 2, 498.

Popular Christian myth tends to portray God as a wise old man who watches over the world, choosing to use only the positive traits that accompany advanced age, such as wisdom, while conveniently forgetting the negative aspects of old age. What Borchert does is use the image of the old man – which is acceptable to traditional Christian thought – and then give it a Nietzschean twist by accentuating the frailty of God's advanced years. God is thus no longer portrayed as the wise old grandfather, but as a frail old man who has one foot in the grave, with the implication that no one pays much attention to him anymore. This becomes apparent for the first time in the dialogue between Beckmann and God in the fifth scene of *Draußen vor der Tür*, when God says to Beckmann, “Keiner glaubt mehr an mich. Du nicht, keiner. Ich bin der Gott, an den keiner mehr glaubt. Und um den sich keiner mehr kümmert. Ihr kümmert euch nicht um mich.”⁴⁸ God, in this case, reflects the words of many older people who feel abandoned by their children, whose actions and beliefs they are no longer able to affect.

The lack of regard that God feels coming from his “children” was already touched on by Nietzsche in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* where one finds the same sort of emotions directed towards God by the prisoners.⁴⁹ It appears that Nietzsche's prisoners do not have the will to listen to the message of hope any longer, because reality has taught them differently. God has become impotent for them, not because he has kept them out of difficulty, but, on the contrary, because He has kept them imprisoned. Borchert's Beckmann reacts to God in much the same manner, because he cannot believe in a God who has not prevented his suffering.

Borchert also weaves the motif of the use and abuse of God into the general theme of the estrangement of God from man. This motif may be found in Nietzsche as well, and is perhaps the most complicated of all the motifs Borchert borrows from Nietzsche. However, it is Borchert who complicates the motif rather than Nietzsche, because Borchert does not directly attack the church, but does so obliquely when he criticizes God in *Draußen vor der Tür*. Nietzsche's dissatisfaction with the manner in which the Christian church abused God may be found throughout his works, but nowhere is it clearer than in *Der Antichrist: Fluch auf das Christentum*. In *Der Antichrist*, Nietzsche criticises the established church for having “castrated.”⁵⁰

Borchert also portrays this “castrated” figure of God, in that God is depicted as the epitome of all that is ineffectual. God can only run about the stage, rubbing his hands, and bemoaning the fate of his children. God's impotence, however, is not of his own doing. For Borchert, it is man, who has relegated Him to this lowly status. It is the theologian's ink transfused into his veins by man that has caused him to fall from his position of power. Nietzsche expresses this same sentiment in “Das Eselgest” of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, where God is made into the image with which man feels comfortable. In “Das Eselgest” the pope answers Zarathustra's query about the foolishness of worshipping an ass by saying, “O Zarathustra, . . . vergib mir, aber in Dingen Gottes bin ich aufgeklärter noch als du. Und so ist's billig. Lieber Gott so anbeten, in dieser Gestalt, als in gar keiner Gestalt!”⁵¹ In both Nietzsche and Borchert the image of God has become a ridiculous parody, of what He once was, at the hands of those who are responsible for maintaining Him within society. The theologians appear as rationalizing their beliefs by saying that such a god is better than no god at all. However, sustaining God at all costs – even to the point of absurdity – shows how God has become impotent in the hands of his handlers.

After having taken God to the absurd, both Nietzsche and Borchert contend that God has become unbelievable. Nietzsche expresses the implausibility of a Christian God in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, when he comments that this God has simply become unworthy of being believed in.⁵²

⁴⁸ Borchert, 1949, 148. Author's Translation: “No one believes in me anymore. Not you, no one. I am the God in whom no one believes anymore. And about whom no one cares anymore. You don't concern yourselves about me anymore.”

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, 915.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist: Fluch auf das Christentum*, 1176.

⁵¹ Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, 548. Author's Translation: “Oh, Zarathustra...forgive me, but in things relating to God, I am even more enlightened than you. And so it's done. Rather worship God in this form than in no form at all.”

⁵² Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 205.

Borchert reiterates the doubt about the credibility of God through the repeated statement “Ich bin der Gott an den keiner mehr glaubt.” Both Nietzsche and Borchert are dealing with a God who has been manipulated by the forces of the religious establishment, and attempt to impress upon the reader how ridiculous God has become, through their exaggeration of the logical end to which the God of the theologians must come.

Nietzsche goes further in his indictment of the church when he calls the churches the crypt and headstone of God.⁵³ Borchert reiterates this sentiment in *Draußen vor der Tür* when Beckmann says to God, “Geh, alter Mann, sie haben dich in den Kirchen eingemauert, wir hören einander nicht mehr.”⁵⁴

The one point upon which Borchert diverges most notably from Nietzsche concerning God, is the element of the hope which God brings to the world. Nietzsche sees no possibility for the resurrection of God, and appears to want man to accept that fact and move on – although one gets the impression that even Nietzsche at times regrets the death of God. As the death of God casts its shadow across Europe, Nietzsche appears to be prophesying the impending conflagrations that were about to grip Europe.⁵⁵ Moreover, he appears to fear a future without God when he laments that there is no new God yet born to replace the old one.⁵⁶ Borchert, however, had survived the devastation that Nietzsche predicted and thus sets about searching for a new God, one who could once more bring hope to humanity, and indeed he appears to have found him swaddling clothes in a manger.

The God that Borchert finds is portrayed in the short story “Die drei dunkeln Könige,” which is a depiction of the birth of Christ set in the aftermath of World War II. In this story, Borchert does not place his hope in the Nietzschean *Übermensch* or in the “old God” who had been created by the protectors of religious orthodoxy, but goes back to the origins of Christianity, where hope is found in the birth of a fully human child.

Borchert also does not limit his message of hope, and refutation of Nietzsche's nihilism, to the new generation that will have to cope with the Germany that has been left to them by their fathers. There is still a glimmer of hope shining forth from the old God, as found in “Nachts schlafen die Ratten doch.” In this story one finds an old man who offers hope to a young boy who is guarding his brother's body from the rats. The old man lies to the boy about the sleeping habits of rats, thus saving him from sleepless nights. In doing so, one sees how the old God can still bring comfort to a new generation, albeit by means of a lie, when he lifts the burden of death from the shoulders of the young boy who was old beyond his years, and in a manner of speaking allowing him to be a child once more.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above comparison, Nietzsche and Borchert do indeed have a great deal in common. One may also observe Borchert not only mirrors Nietzsche's philosophy to a large degree, but refutes Nietzsche's ideas when they do not agree with his own views. When one analyses the textual and thematic similarities between Borchert and Nietzsche, one receives a clearer picture of what the concept of God is in Borchert's works. One sees firstly that for Borchert God is not dead, but only old and weak. It also becomes apparent that Borchert draws a sharp distinction between God the highest being, and God the highest thought that man can imagine – a distinction that Nietzsche at times also appears to make, but more often than not simply leaves God as a prisoner of man's highest thoughts. Borchert may thus be seen as someone who was dissatisfied with the God that had been created by the theologians, and one who was in search of the true God. He hoped to find this authentic God by writing

⁵³ Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 128.

⁵⁴ Borchert, 1949, 149. Author's Translation: “Go old man. They have walled you into their churches. We don't hear one another anymore.”

⁵⁵ Michael Harrington, *The Politics of the Death of God: The Spiritual Crisis of the Western World* (New York: Holt, Reinhard and Winston, 1983), 2-3.

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, Also sprach Zarathustra, 532.

with a hammer, just as Nietzsche intended to philosophize with a hammer, discarding the old image of the *Märchenbuchliebergott*; replacing Him with a God that meets the needs of post-war Germany. In doing so, Borchert strips away the myth which surrounds God, and the barriers that the church erects to hold Him captive. Thus humanity can once more enjoy direct contact with a God who is not a eunuch, but offers hope to a world turned upside-down.

One also sees Borchert emerging not as an atheist and nihilist as popularized by Rühmkorf, amongst others, but as someone who wants very much to believe in a God. The only difficulty being that Borchert was not satisfied with what had become of God in Christianity, and thus must begin to search for his own God. The only way in which Borchert could realize his own God was by destroying the old God as conceived of by the religious hierarchy and theology. Unfortunately, up until now Borchert had been identified with Nietzsche's nihilism, without the commentators examining exactly how Nietzsche's philosophy was being used by Borchert, in his works.

Borchert's God-concept is unquestionably unconventional. God, for Borchert, ought no longer be encumbered by the shackles of the religious establishment, and the individual should be free to enter into a direct relationship with Him. Borchert reveals completely the short-comings of a God who has been anthropomorphized to the point of absurdity.

Religion, or religious practice (i.e. the organized Church) is shown to be the culprit behind the ineffectuality of God. So, Borchert seeks to circumvent the bureaucracy which acts as a filtering agent. In doing so, Borchert regresses (progresses?) into a form of pietistic panentheism, which allows for God's and humanity's existence to be interdependent. Here one sees what Borchert intended when he began his redefinition of God in "Die Hundebblume." God is no longer to be viewed as an external force, but one which is to be found within all of humanity, to which the individual can either say yes or no (Klarmann 41).⁵⁷

To some degree, Borchert can be seen to have nihilistic tendencies, but only to the extent of the limitations which Borchert himself places on such a definition. He is a nihilist to the point of discarding the old God as no longer relevant. Having thrown out the old, worn out ideas, Borchert begins to reveal a new God in later works. As the new God becomes apparent, humanity can begin to embrace the hope which this new God brings. Humanity can thus, once more, face the future with confidence, because the burden of death has been lifted from its collective shoulders.

⁵⁷ Adolf Klarmann, "Wolfgang Borchert: The Lost Voice of Germany," *The Germanic Review* 27, no. 3 (1952): 113-114. Klarmann postulates that Borchert believed that God was waiting to be redeemed by man, just as man had been earlier redeemed by God through Christ.

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