love, and loss.

It is quite possible that Brahms, on one of his frequent walks in Vienna's Prater, encountered young Dr. Sigmund Freud, who was beginning his epochal studies during the last years of Brahms's life. Had Freud taken Brahms as a patient, he might have helped the composer recognize and overcome his inner dilemmas. Instead, Brahms, unable or unwilling to express his agony verbally, allowed it to find expression in his music. As Swafford argues, it guided his choice of themes, harmonic expressions, and metrics, imparting the mood of elegiac lyricism that suffuses so many of his compositions. Here, then, was a classic case of "bourgeois" repression, directed not toward others but toward himself, and with consequences that have immensely enriched the lives of millions of Brahms listeners from his day to ours.

Just as Gay's book can be seen as less critique than appreciation of the bourgeois culture makers, so Swafford's biography is a warmly sympathetic account of an artist who shrank from sympathy. Delving behind the beard, cigar, raunchy tales, and gruff misogyny, Swafford has rescued a private person who was sensitive, vulnerable, and, in the biographer's word, feminine. By comparison, Brahms's critics among the modernists and "bourgeoisophobes," both in his day and ours, seem repressed, cold, and, yes, philistine.

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Spycraft and Soulcraft

THE FILE:
A Personal History.
By Timothy Garton Ash.
Knopf. 262 pp. $23

by William McPherson

Two years after the opening of the Berlin Wall and one year after the unification of the two Germanys, the Bundestag voted to open the files of East Germany's infamously efficient secret police as of January 2, 1992. Thereafter, anyone who had a file could read it (under carefully regulated conditions designed to protect the privacy of the innocent). There were six million of them, a file for one of every three citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR)—and one for the British historian, journalist, and author Timothy Garton Ash as well.

The files filled 125 miles of shelves. For the GDR to maintain this archive of shame and keep it current required, in the last year of its operation, more than 90,000 full-time workers and 170,000 unofficial collaborators, giving about one of every 50 adult East Germans a direct connection with the Ministry for State Security. While not unique in the extent of its spying on citizens, Germany was and is unique in bringing the files to light—which, like the spying, has proved to be a vast and costly undertaking. In 1996 alone, Garton Ash tells us, the budget for the Gauck Authority, which administers the Stasi's voluminous records, was 234.3 million deutsche marks, about $164 million, more than the entire defense budget of Lithuania.

But the personal costs were something else again. Families were split, lives shattered, friendships destroyed. The sense of betrayal was beyond imagining. To cite one well-known example, East German dissident Vera Wollenberger was constantly harassed by the Stasi, was once imprisoned, and was fired from her job. After unification she successfully ran for parliament, where she was instrumental in formulating the law that provided access to the files. Reading her own, she discovered that the man code-named Donald, who

Among the Stasi files

had most assiduously informed on her, could be no one but her husband, the father of her children.

Such knowledge can be costly indeed, and the outlines of Wollenberger's terrible story are unfortunately not unique. In the circumstances of Eastern and Central Europe, however, ignorance is neither blissful nor cheap; it comes with its own high price—I would say a higher price—in cynicism, suspicion, and despair. The experience of countries less open and less committed to coming to terms with the past than Germany, those countries that did not have a western half to assist in their decommunization (and pay the expenses of it), attests to that.

As has been remarked, evil often has a banal look. As a file, Garton Ash's is not remarkable; it is his excavation of it that fascinates. In 1978, as a 23-year-old student fresh out of Oxford, Garton Ash set off for Berlin to research his doctoral thesis on Germany in the Third Reich. During the course of his time there, his attention gradually shifted from Hitler's Germany to Erich Honeker's. After living in West Berlin for a year and a half, he passed through Checkpoint Charlie in January 1980 to East Berlin, where he had been offered a place as a research student at Humboldt University. He stayed there nine months, during which the Stasi accumulated most of his 325-page file. (Its size was fairly modest; the dissident singer Wolf Biermann merited 40,000 pages.) In it he was given the code name Romeo, which Garton Ash would prefer to believe (who wouldn't?) referred to his youthful romantic adventures rather than to his new, dark-blue Alfa Romeo, which must have attracted considerable attention in the homeland of the Trabant.

After 15 years and with five books to his credit—distinguished studies of Poland, Germany, and Central Europe—he returned to an undivided Berlin in order "to investigate their investigation of me." That is, he intended to read his file, to compare it with his own contemporaneous notes, memories, and diaries, and to meet again the five who had informed on him (one of them an English communist teaching in East Berlin) and the officers who hired them. He also wanted to learn what "makes one person a resistance fighter and another the faithful servant of a dictatorship—this man a Stauffenberg, that a Speer?" He is less successful in answering that question, which is, finally, unanswerable. As retired intelligence officers of both sides wanted him to understand, "their best agents were always the volunteers."

Garton Ash had been fascinated, as he puts it, with spies and spying since his undergraduate days at Oxford, when he was first approached by MI6, the Secret Intelligence Service. Two years later, shortly before leaving for Berlin, he applied to the service, returned from Berlin to take the exams, and later submitted to a long interview and finally a medical check and security examination. He was intrigued but uneasy, especially after an MI6 officer told him in reference to a planned trip to the Soviet bloc, "We would rather have you under our control." Control, of course, was what got to him. Eventually he let the matter of his application trail off. Years later, after he had started work on his Stasi file, he was again

approached by British intelligence and asked if he would keep an eye from time to time on certain students and visitors to Oxford, where he teaches. He declined, but decided then to do a little investigating of "our British secret world." He's got a file there too, he was told, where he is registered as a "nonadversarial" for having "assisted SIS." The contents of that file remain closed; no, he cannot see it.

There is of course, a certain satisfaction (along with a lot of other emotions) in knowing that one is important enough to *have* a file. In Berlin, there exists now a kind of "file envy," the author tells us, the file as status symbol. Among the students, it is used by young men as an aid to the seduction of "luscious Sabine." (When Sabine learns that in fact Joachim has no file, she moves on to someone who does.) Vanity crosses all borders, but it is not under investigation in this book.

His Stasi file becomes for Garton Ash what the cookie was for Proust, the key to a youthful and romantic lost time in the city where the opposing forces in the Cold War met head on, where the values of free society with all its attendant messiness confronted, on the other side of that very high Wall, the clear, clean lines of authoritarian dictatorship. Which is rather like the Wall itself, one might note (although the author does not): viewed from the west it was covered with graffiti; from the east it was austere, white as chalk, unapproachable. Seldom in life are lines so clear-cut.

This book is, in part, a rumination on time and the memories that the file unlocked. The temptation, as the author says, is always to pick and choose our past, but "we must take it all or leave it all." What prevents his picking and choosing, what gives rein to the imagination, are his training as a historian, the "special truth tests" to which he must always submit—either something happened or it did not—and the scrupulously recorded details in his file, even when those details are wrong, as they often are. Imagination and memory are tempered here by fact.

When the facts in the file are right, they tend to be absurd, and absurdly detailed. On a particular day when he was living in West Berlin, he bought three newspapers at 4:07 P.M. in the upper station concourse on the eastern side of the Wall. The newspapers are named. Eight minutes later, he greeted "a female person with handshake and kiss on the cheek." The woman wore a red beret and carried a brown shoulder bag; Garton Ash wore a green jacket. And so on, and so on, through a series of coffees and restaurants until he returns by train to West Berlin at 11:55 P.M. and the surveillance is terminated. This is intelligence? Ridiculously, yes—although, had the situation been different, it might have been consequential, and not so ridiculous, either.

Other items in his file are more sinister. There is a careful description of the room he lives in. Telephones are tapped. ("Their equipment could be programmed to record any conversation in which a particular word or name was mentioned.") His notes and papers are photographed during a clandestine search of his luggage at Schoenefeld Airport. He is followed and secretly photographed. His trips to Poland come under serious scrutiny. The file even contains copies of the references written by his Oxford tutors for the British Council. And then there are the informers, the "unofficial collaborators," to one degree or another friends, who, although they did him no serious damage, provided a continuous feed of information to the hungry functionaries of the Stasi. (Under the circumstances, the playwright Arthur Miller's blurb on *The File*'s book jacket—"No population was as closely watched for signs of dissidence, although Hoover's FBI came fairly close at times"—is laughable. Even in its wildest excesses, the FBI never approached the scale, the thoroughness, or the physical menace—poisonings, irradiation, and the like—posed by any Eastern European secret police agency.)

The Stasi was interested in Garton Ash not so much for his studies as for his work as a journalist for *The Spectator* and the BBC, and for his growing connection to the Solidarity movement in Poland, the subject of one of his later books. For the Stasi, as for all the Communist intelli-

gence organs, "a Western journalist and a Western spy were both agents of Western intelligence-gathering, and both alike threats to the security of the communist system." They were right, although not in the way they understood it. Eventually all of this and the book he published on East Germany got him banned from the country.

The author's file survived, but many did not. In the offices of the Gauck Authority, which had been the Stasi's central archive ("a ministry of truth occupying the former ministry of fear" is how Garton Ash describes it), is something called the "copper cauldron." Once intended to house in an interference-free zone "a vast new computer system containing all the information on everybody," it now contains "hundreds of sacks stuffed with tiny pieces of paper: documents torn up in the weeks between the beginning of mass protest in the autumn of 1989 and the storming of the ministry in 1990." The Gauck Authority is attempting to piece them together. Although the shredders and incinerators and bonfires were busy all over the former Warsaw Pact as the old guys tried to save their skins while the regimes they supported were falling—and after they fell as well—other countries were not so careful to save the scraps. As I write this I am looking at the charred remains of files from the Romanian secret police, picked up from a remote pit where tons of them had been dumped and set afire several months after the fall of the Ceauşescu regime. Some of the files found there postdate the revolution of 1989.

In Germany, this shredding and burning of the most sensitive files temporarily stopped when the Stasi headquarters were occupied in January 1990. "But then, in an extraordinary decision of the Round Table negotiating the transition from communist rule, the foreign intelligence service, alone among all the departments of the Stasi, was formally empowered to continue its own 'self-dissolution.'" Most of the records of that branch have since been destroyed—or as is sometimes said, and as Garton Ash reports, transported in part to Moscow. Curious. Perhaps it was convenient for everyone that the records be destroyed or moved. Perhaps the records were too dangerous, not only to the East but to the West, which in the defense of liberty played some extreme games of its own.

So what is one to conclude? "What you find here, in the files," Garton Ash writes, "is less malice than human weakness, a vast anthology of human weakness. And when you talk to those involved, what you find is less deliberate dishonesty than our almost infinite capacity for self-deception. If only I had met, on this search, a single clearly evil person. But they were all just weak, shaped by circumstances, self-deceiving; human, all too human. Yet the sum of their actions was a great evil."

And, beyond the scope of Garton Ash's search through his own file, some of the perpetrators did evil, too. The costs of bringing out this truth, of exposing the files to light and history, are enormous, but the benefits are greater.

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The Reluctant President

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS:
A Public Life, a Private Life.
By Paul C. Nagel. Knopf. 432 pp. $30

by Kenneth Silverman

Beginning at age 11, John Quincy Adams kept a diary for nearly 70 years. It makes a Great Wall of self-reflection that, with related material, stretches across nearly 50 reels of the Adams Papers microfilm. Paul Nagel, author of two