

THE POST-WAR DIVISION OF BERLIN AND ITS
SOCIAL EFFECTS, AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE
TRANSLATIONS OF THREE SHORT STORIES
BY INGEBORG DREWITZ

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**The Post-War Division Of Berlin And Its Social Effects,
As Illustrated By The Translations Of Three Short Stories**

By Ingeborg Drewitz

by
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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of

the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Memorial University of Newfoundland

May, 2003

St. John's

Newfoundland

Abstract

This thesis examines three short stories by Ingeborg Drewitz, translated from German to English for this specific purpose. All three stories deal with a major concern of Drewitz, namely the effects the separation between East and West Germany had on the population. The introduction comments on the importance of the stories, their relevance to the chosen topic, and the author's writing techniques. A brief account of the historical events leading up to the establishment of the Berlin Wall will provide the necessary background information to set the stories into context. A further section is dedicated to Ingeborg Drewitz herself, including a look at her childhood, her literary accomplishments and awards. The central portion of the thesis is the presentation of the English translations of the stories, each followed by a brief analysis. The concluding comparison of these stories focuses on their contribution to the overall theme.

Acknowledgments

In the compilation and writing of this thesis, I received inestimable furtherance from a number of sources, which I wish to acknowledge gratefully.

I wish to express gratitude to the members of the Department of German and Russian for their assistance throughout the program.

A special thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Ursula Sampath, whose knowledge, patience and support during the research and writing phase of the thesis will always be greatly appreciated.

Last but not least, a sincere thanks to my husband, parents and three daughters, Alexandria, Samantha and Christina for their understanding and support.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The main focus of this thesis is the translation and interpretation of three short stories about the post-war partition of Berlin, by the prominent writer and political critic Ingeborg Drewitz. The German titles of these stories are: *Die Frau mit dem schwarzen Kopftuch* (*The Woman with the Black Headscarf*), *Der Nebenmann* (*The One by My Side*), and *Die gefangene Stadt* (*The Imprisoned City*). Unlike Drewitz' novels and some of her other works, these particular short stories have not yet been translated from the original German into English, and are thus unfamiliar to the English-speaking reader.

In view of Drewitz' many literary distinctions, it is surprising that she enjoyed only a "beschränkte Rezeption [ihres] fiktionalen Oeuvres."¹ One reason may be that only some of her works have been translated into English. Shafi feels the explanation lies in the fact that although Drewitz is a well-known author, during the years of the East-West conflict she was seen as somewhat conservative, already one of the older generation, certainly not

¹ Monika Shafi, "Die überforderte Generation : Mutterfiguren in Romanen von Ingeborg Drewitz," Women-In-German-Yearbook:-Feminist-Studies-in-German-Literature-and-Culture 7 (1991): 26.

in the forefront of the new group of feminist writers.² There were undoubtedly reviews of her works in contemporary papers; unfortunately these were not available to me.

The main theme of these stories concerns the division of Germany in the European context, one of the most notable historical events of the 20th century. The aftermath of World War II continued to greatly impact the lives of those left to deal with the establishment of two distinct German States and the presence of the Iron Curtain.

This literary subject remains relevant for discussion, since several years after the abolition of the Berlin Wall the possibility exists that the circumstances surrounding the traumatic division of Germany may fade into history. Already, writers turn their attention to the problems brought about by the reunification of East and West Germany. The erection of the Berlin Wall and the negative effects it brought about should not be forgotten, so that future generations may learn from past wrongful actions. Ingeborg Drewitz' work, of which the chosen three stories are very typical, has much to contribute in this respect.

This topic was chosen because of my own personal interest in this piece of history. Having had the opportunity to visit East Germany before

² Ibid 26-27.

the fall of the Wall, and again a few years later, shortly after reunification, I found it intriguing to see the vast differences in culture and ways of thinking which the presence of the Wall created.

The author of the three literary works under discussion, Ingeborg Drewitz, was born, grew up, and lived in West Berlin. Both physically and emotionally, she was close to the division, and, being politically active throughout her adult life, she felt a need to write about the happenings she saw around her. In her political essays and presentations, she confronts the problems directly. In her fiction, she takes the reader inside the world of those affected by the division of Germany, and shows indirectly how people of all ages and all walks of life had to deal with the situation of the Iron Curtain, and the human cost involved. Her literary works focus on the problems and misery this partition created.

These three short stories were selected for their suitability to the chosen topic, since they present important insights, from various points of view, on how the division affected Germans living on both sides of the border. Through details provided within these stories, one is able to better comprehend the political situation, and the emotional state experienced by the population during this particular epoch of German history. The narratives provide an important overview of the atmosphere from various

angles and different points of view, enabling the author to create a clearer picture of the situation of Germany at that time. While similar themes and concerns occur in each of the three narrations, they augment each other, and all contain their own valuable contributions and insights, pertaining to events that were a reality for those forced to live under the strict power of the Communist regime, and as citizens of a divided nation.

The thesis format will begin with a brief look at the author, including background information pertaining to her childhood in Berlin and her concerns about the division of Germany. In order to set the three stories into context, a short overview of the historical facts will be given, beginning with the political events surrounding Berlin shortly after the end of World War II. Social conditions will be mentioned, and aspects of everyday life in both the East and West will be touched upon. The translations of the individual stories are then presented, each followed by a brief analysis, bringing out the issues Drewitz wished to convey to the reader. I will also comment on Drewitz' style, which contributes to the effect of these stories. A final summarizing chapter will discuss the overall effect of the three translated stories, pointing out similarities and differences between them.

Chapter 2

Ingeborg Drewitz

It was in the year 1923, on January 10th, that Ingeborg Neubert was born in Berlin. She was the first-born child of Eugen and Hildegard Neubert, and was raised in a large family. Growing up during the time of the reign of Hitler and the National Socialists, she experienced firsthand how the impact of the Nazi Regime was beginning to manifest itself throughout her country and to penetrate into the everyday lives of the people, including her own family. Her parents' views on the Nazi Party, which were well known to her, varied in their degree of acceptance. Her mother was against the Hitler Regime; her father, however, felt it necessary to join the Hitler Party for the purpose of obtaining work, since for several years he had been unemployed. This caused a great deal of tension in her family. When Ingeborg joined the Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM), an organization of young girls run by the Nazi government, she did not gain approval from her mother, but her father suggested it would be in the best interest of the family for her to be part of this organization. Her mother, who persistently demonstrated to her children her own disgust with the present political situation, once again showed her disagreement with the Nazi beliefs, and

would not permit her daughter to wear a Nazi flag on her jacket in school, like many of the other children did.

Already in her childhood, Ingeborg began to notice the anti-semitic feelings revealed by Nazi supporters in her hometown. When she was still a young pupil, she had Jewish friends and felt that "...nur der Religionsunterricht uns [trennte]."³ Outside of their religious beliefs, to her they were her classmates and friends, no different from the other, non-Jewish children. Yet one instance that occurred to her, mentioned in her book *Lebenslehrzeit*, pertains to a friend of Jewish descent with whom she would frequently walk to school, and who remarked to her one day as they were going to class: "[H]offentlich hat dich keiner mit mir gesehen..."⁴. Ingeborg could see even at this young age how children were beginning to feel the restrictions being placed on them with regard to whom they were now allowed to have association.

While growing up in Berlin during this time, she noticed some family friends and neighbours moving to America or Israel because of their religious beliefs. Several stores, where her family would often shop, were now being taken over by other people, as the Jewish families would leave,

³ Ingeborg Drewitz, *Lebenslehrzeit* (Stuttgart: Radius-Verlag Gmbtt, 1985) 9.

⁴ Ibid 20.

when they sensed the beginnings of anti-semitism in Germany during the ascent of Hitler.

After completing high school, she worked at several jobs in order to save money for furthering her studies. She tutored students, worked in a flower shop, laundromat, and as a maid. She also participated in the war effort, which included such duties as writing an estimated 150 families daily, notifying them of their sons' death. During this time she wrote a letter to her father stating that "Hitler ist wahnsinnig,"⁵ and that she did not agree with the actions and teachings of the National Socialists.

In 1946 she married Bernhard Drewitz, and two years later her first of three daughters was born. Even while raising a family, she focused on her literary career, and produced many short stories, radio plays, and numerous articles for newspapers and journals. Ingeborg Drewitz can be seen as representative of the modern woman of today, who often has to balance family responsibilities with the demands of a successful career. It is noteworthy that she believed in the equal treatment of women in the work force, i.e. that they should be entitled to the equivalent salary and opportunities as their male counterparts.

⁵ Ibid 27.

Drewitz was awarded many prizes for her literary works. For her 1951 drama *Alle Tore waren bewacht* she received the Carl Zuckmayer prize (1952), which entailed a trip to Yugoslavia. This same piece of literature won her the Jochen-Klepper-Gedächtnisplakette (1955). A few years later she received a scholarship to travel to France, awarded to her for her works *Frühling für alle* and *Die Macht der Hölle*. There were other awards, including the Georg-Mackensen-Preis (1970), the Carl-von-Ossietsky-Medaille of the International League for Human Rights (1980) and the Premio Minerva of the Women's Association, Rome (1986). She was also a member of numerous professional organizations, including the 'Gemeinschaft deutscher und österreichischer Künstlerinnen (GEDOK)', the 'Verband deutscher Schriftsteller (VS)', the 'Neue Gesellschaft für Literatur,' and was not only a member of but actively involved in the 'PEN-Zentrum der Bundesrepublik Deutschland'. As a member of this latter organization, she wanted to strengthen contact between West and East German writers, and to offer them assistance concerning their literary endeavours. She was not only interested in helping her fellow German writers, but was very concerned with the rights and freedoms of writers from other countries as well, including Poland and Russia. Being very politically active, she spoke out against the Franco Regime in Spain, and wanted to

help Spanish writers who were experiencing difficulties with respect to censorship.

Yet since she was born and raised in Berlin during the Nazi period, she always held the events in Berlin especially close to her heart. It was the experiences of seeing life under Hitler's Regime, the affects the National Socialists had on German society, and the impact of the post-war partition, which prompted Drewitz' initial interest in writing on this subject. As she said: "Die Teilung, die Grenze zwischen den beiden Deutschland, beschäftigte mich sehr."⁶ Being a very prominent political writer from West Berlin, she had a personal interest in her city and how it changed following World War II, and after the erection of the Berlin Wall. As Drewitz puts it, she felt she was a

... Wächterin
im zugigen Tor zwischen zwei
deutschen Staaten, die zwar verschiedene
politische Glaubensbekenntnisse, doch eine
gemeinsame Vergangenheit und eine gemeinsame
Sprache haben...⁷

In this self-chosen role, she kept a close watch over her city, and is therefore able to show the reader, through information and experience

⁶ Ingeborg Drewitz, Die Samtvorhänge: Erzählungen, Szene, Berichte (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1978) 121.

gained by living in the situation, how the division of Germany affected all aspects of daily life for the people in both East and West Berlin. Especially with regard to the citizens east of the border, Drewitz uses examples to demonstrate to her audience how people's freedom, independence and spirit were forced to change by a totalitarian regime.

Drewitz had many talents as a writer. She was not only a novelist, and author of numerous short stories, but was also very politically outspoken, writing many essays and articles on current events and situations. According to her friend Heinrich Albertz, one can even see her as "...eher eine Sozialreporterin als eine Schriftstellerin."⁸ She did not hesitate to incorporate her own views and opinions of the economic and political situation of the time into her writing; and the experiences she encountered during her childhood at the time of the Hitler era. She felt it was her duty as a writer to speak out against the evils of the world, and did not try to hide her feelings and thoughts on issues dealing with the ill treatment of others. Through public appeals and letters to newspapers, she would whole-heartedly support people who she felt were being treated unjustly, such as other writers in exile, or immigrants, and did not hesitate to champion even unpopular causes. In 1974 she participated,

⁷ Titus Häussermann, Ingeborg Drewitz: Materialien zu Werk und Wirken (Stuttgart: Radius-Verlag, 1983) 7.

along with other writers and students, in a four-day long hunger strike for the lost rights of prisoners. In 1976 she would regularly exchange letters with a prisoner, and through him learned of the conditions of the prisons, the treatment of the inmates, and the feelings of isolation they experienced. She was active in many other areas, and often spoke up against things she did not agree with. For example, along with the organization of students called the Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund (SDS), Drewitz supported their opposition against the involvement of the United States in Vietnam. Heinrich Albertz once said of Drewitz, "Diese Frau ist auf einmalige Weise mitten in allen Konflikten," and that she "...kämpft an vielen Fronten."⁹

In the literary world there appears to be a continual debate as to whether one is able to distinguish if the author of a particular piece of literature is male or female. In one of her articles, Ingeborg Drewitz touches upon this topic wondering, "... whether in a poem by a woman we can detect an unusual way of experiencing things...", or whether "... bonds between women are treated more elaborately than in the traditional novel... written by a man."¹⁰ On this same note, Drewitz mentions that this difference may manifest itself in several ways, suggesting that it may be

⁸ Ibid 2.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ingeborg Drewitz, "The Contribution of Women Authors to the Discovery of People of Female Sex in German-Speaking Literature since 1945," Studies-in-Twentieth-Century-Literature 9.2 (1985): 279.

“...plot, emotional commitment or the method of structuring a text that permit the distinctiveness of feminine experience to be detected.”¹¹ It is presumed that women experience things differently than men, and what a man may perceive as important in the development of plot or characters in a story, may not hold true for his female counterparts, hence the varying degrees of emphasis placed on specific elements of a narration.

Drewitz also indirectly, through her literary works, gives her readers insight into what her own political and personal beliefs are. She allows the reader to interpret her own negative attitude toward the Hitler era. She shows through her stories how people, herself included, felt about the consequences of the war and a divided Germany. The sufferings of the people are clearly described, along with examples of how their worlds were turned upside down. Drewitz gives her readers access into the minds of the characters, cleverly portraying their feelings, thoughts and observations in the given situations.

Above all, the author gives her audience great insight into the condition of Berlin after the war. These are first-hand observations since, as stated above, Drewitz grew up in Berlin and watched the Wall being erected, dividing her city. Through her descriptions of the landscapes, buildings, and

¹¹ Ibid

the physical and emotional state of the people, readers are able to form a better mental picture of this specific period in history. On the other hand, her works include a very realistic approach, interweaving the narrative with references to recognizable locations, and factual happenings that occurred in Berlin after the war.

In this regard, her literary style is very interesting and characteristic for her work as a whole, yet she does not spell everything out in great detail, but rather expects us to read between the lines and come to our own interpretation of the story. Some of her sentence structures seem abrupt, showing deliberate gaps to be filled. She often only gives some of her characters' names, while others, sometimes even the main figures in her story, remain nameless. One can assume that this was done in order to give these people a greater significance, i.e., make them representative of anyone who may be in the same situation as the characters in the story. These figures stand for the hundreds of Germans who during the division of Germany could have easily been in the same predicament Drewitz describes.

Much of Drewitz' work concentrates on how the division of East and West Germany after the war impacted the lives of all Germans. It was her life's work, her passion, to tell the world what the situation was like, and what the general public had to experience as a result. Perhaps by relating

this part of German history, the author tried to make it difficult for further generations to forget the pain and hardship that the generations of this era had to endure.

Chapter 3

Historical Background

In the presentation of the three short stories under discussion, Ingeborg Drewitz takes the familiarity of her readers with the details of Germany's postwar division for granted. However, since more than a decade has passed since the abolition of the so-called Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall, and the amalgamation of the two post-war German states, a brief look back at the historical facts and resulting inequalities between East and West are in order.

After World War II had ended in 1945, and the Germans formally surrendered to the Allies, the United States, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union respectively acquired authority over Germany. Already prior to the surrender, it had been planned for these four powers to divide the country and its capital Berlin into four zones, in order to prevent the possibility of a future German domination. It was assumed that the division, occupation and control of Germany would guarantee the impossibility of this country to emerge once again as a superpower, as it had done during the time of Hitler and the National Socialists or Nazis. The Allies' aim for Germany was to enforce "... denazification, demilitarization, economic

decentralization and the reeducation of the Germans along democratic lines.”¹²

In February of 1945, at the Yalta conference, the allied leaders expanded and confirmed what had already been discussed at the London Protocol of September 1944, namely that after Germany’s unconditional surrender, Berlin be occupied by the Soviet Union, Great Britain, the United States and France.

Conflicting views on the future status of Berlin soon created problems between the Soviet Union and the three other Western Allies. The Soviet Union regarded the presence of the Allies as merely a temporary measure, expecting that later Berlin would fall solely under the power of the Soviet Union. However, the year 1948 brought an important turning point. The establishment of a common currency and a new economic order were put into place by the Western Powers in the German regions under their control. The Soviet Union, in response to this measure and as a show of power, imposed a blockade on all land access routes to Berlin, exposing its economic vulnerability and hoping to enforce the former capital’s integration into the Soviet Bloc. The Western Powers were determined not to be intimidated, and supplied Berlin for eleven months by way of planes,

¹² A. Hoffmann, Facts about Germany (Frankfurt/Main: Societäts-Verlag, 1992) 90.

bringing in all materials the city needed for its survival. Finally, in May 1949, the Soviets gave in and lifted their blockade of Berlin.

On May 23, 1949, the three Western Allies permitted the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), with a Capitalist form of government, and Bonn as its capital. Due to this course of action, on October 7, 1949, the Soviets in turn converted their occupation zone into the German Democratic Republic (GDR), with East Berlin named as its capital, imposing on its sector a Communist government. Thus the development of two separate German states was set in motion.

In the beginning, restriction of movement between East and West Berlin was not yet too obtrusive. Germans living in both the East and West were still able to visit relatives and friends living on the other side of the city. In fact, many East Berliners held jobs in the West and would commute back and forth on a daily basis.

However, the division of Germany into East and West caused a great deal of concern to the German people for many decades to follow. This separation of the two Germanies soon affected its citizens on a large scale. They were separated physically, politically, economically and spiritually, a situation that had a great impact on almost every aspect of daily life. Altogether, the German people were separated for over forty years, and

during this time, many cultural differences began to develop, becoming more apparent as the years passed.

Unlike East Berlin, West Berlin quickly began to rebuild itself after the war, and was becoming a thriving, modern metropolis. It boasted movie theatres, a variety of restaurants, night-clubs, and a fantastic array of cultural outlets such as operas, and concert and theatre performances. Life was fast-paced, colourful and exciting. Unlike their countrymen in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), West Berliners enjoyed a high standard of living. Support by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and modern technology boosted the economy. Clothing was in fashion, i.e. in keeping with the taste of the western world. The people in the West were permitted to buy any type of reading material or music that they wished, unlike the East Germans who from the beginning had to live with censorship of all media. Living under a Capitalist government, one was free to buy and own property and purchase a wide variety of goods and luxury items.

In contrast, society in the GDR, including East Berlin, did not progress as much as that in the Capitalist West. In some aspects it was as if time had stood still. Although compared with other countries in the Communist Bloc, East Germany had one of the highest standards of living, it in no way could compare with that of the West.

The physical look of both sides of the city underlined the differences. Many areas on the Eastern side looked dark and desolate, continuing to show signs of war damage. Life was quieter, and ran at a much slower pace than in the West. Access to material goods, including a variety of basic foods such as fruits and vegetables, was limited. The city appeared old-fashioned, from the little corner stores to the clothing people were able to purchase. It often took years with one's name on a waiting list before being permitted to own, for instance, a washing machine or a telephone. There seemed to be a dark cloud over East Berlin, causing it to appear dingy and its spirit somber. Everything was controlled by the State, including housing, salaries, education, and numerous other aspects of everyday living.

To be sure, there were some advantages for those living in the East: basic food items, housing and public transport were subsidized and affordable. Some unskilled labourers could receive salaries comparable to those of an educated professional. The government wanted to create a system unlike the Western, Capitalist one, in which hard work and ambition played a major role in the type of career and position one would obtain. The ideal for the Communists was a system based on equality with regard to income and access to the necessities of life. The East German government

“...not only suppressed any kind of democratic development and free market planning, but also stifled personal initiative and individual thinking.”¹³

Undoubtedly even harder to bear than material deprivations, and certainly of great concern to Ingeborg Drewitz, were the many restrictions in personal freedom that the Communist government in East Germany imposed on its citizens. Unlike people in the East, West Germans enjoyed freedom of speech and religion. Writers were not under strict censorship like those in the East. Therefore, when Westerners crossed the border into the East, their vehicles were checked for reading material, since in the view of the Communists, exposure to it might poison the minds of the East German citizens. The government of the German Democratic Republic was evidently fearful that its people would learn more about the happenings outside their sheltered existence, and consequently might either want to leave or disagree with official policies, which could potentially cause weakness in the government's strong hold on its citizens.

Not surprisingly, the social differences manifested themselves even in the arts. In East Germany, the official censorship system ensured that authors and artists did not write or express everything they felt concerning the government and the way of life in the East if it contained negative

¹³ Cornelia Heins, The Wall Falls: An Oral History of the Two Germanies (London, England: Grey Seal, 1994) 317.

connotations. For that reason alone, many writers left for the West when they had the opportunity, especially before the Berlin Wall was in place. Those who remained had to adapt to the officially prescribed ideology and way of life, and try to conform and write what was acceptable to the State, in the manner of 'Socialist Realism', which refers to the Socialists' depiction of reality, portraying their citizens in a positive light, with their main objective being the creation a classless society.

Still, there remained a small contingent of authors who could not find it in themselves to conform, and were therefore at odds with the regime. In the beginning, many of these authors living in East Germany wanted to write and produce their type of work as they pleased, but found it difficult or impossible to find a publisher. Having no choice, they ended up producing "... literature according to the prescribed formula, featuring one-dimensional model citizens, whose temporary troubles were invariably overcome through socialist action."¹⁴ Compared to West German literature, whose access to publishing houses depended not on official approval, but on other factors, such as literary merit, marketability, and promotion, special topics of concern, such as women's rights, environmental issues or disagreement with

¹⁴ Hanna Behrend, German Unification: The Destruction of an Economy (East Haven, CT: Pluto Press, 1995) 188.

government policies, were therefore notably absent in East German publications.

With the division of Germany, there also arose differences in the role of religion. In West Germany there was freedom of religion, with the majority of citizens being members of either the Protestant or Catholic Churches. There were, however, other, smaller religious groups as well. The increasing number of guest workers from other countries, especially from Turkey, has caused a rise in the number of Moslems living in West Germany. Statistics estimate that there are close to "... 1.7 million Moslems, mostly Turks..."¹⁵ residing there today. West Germany takes great pride in the religious freedom of its people. One provision of the Basic Law states:

Freedom of faith and conscience as well as freedom of religious or other belief shall be inviolable. The undisturbed practice of religion shall be guaranteed.¹⁶

This law ensures the citizens of their right to be a practicing member of any denomination they choose.

The citizens of East Germany had quite different circumstances to deal with regarding religion. The Communist regime strongly discouraged

the practice of religion, following Marxist views on this matter. Religion was banished from the schools as a teachable subject. People were encouraged not to have christenings, confirmations and church weddings. As an acceptable substitute, the State offered similar ceremonies without religious connotations.

However, in spite of official sanctions against its public role, the Protestant Church continued to have a very important position in the East. It first wanted to try and work within the system and not necessarily against it, even though Church and State had many conflicting views. The Church was reluctantly recognized as an important institution within the socialist form of government in East Berlin. This step of recognition proved to be important to many citizens. The Church often provided a welcoming place or a sort of safe haven for many people frustrated with everyday life under the power of the regime. It was a place for many to come together to discuss their fears, dreams and concerns about the future, relatively free of repercussions. It also provided a forum for debates and criticism about the current form of government. However, many of these groups who sought some sort of freedom to discuss these important issues later felt it necessary to move away from the shelter of the Church, and to form separate discussion groups,

¹⁵ Hoffmann 320.

¹⁶ Hoffmann 317.

adding nonreligious issues such as environmental problems and human rights to their concerns. Not all church members agreed with these groups, and some feared they might go too far and upset the government. The Church did not want to lose the modest privileges it had already obtained from the regime, such as comparatively little censorship of its publications, and the permission to have special events on television and radio.

Another important difference that manifested itself with the division of Germany was the freedom people had with regard to career choices. In West Germany one was permitted to follow the type of education or specialization appropriate for a chosen career path. These decisions were made on a personal basis. The East Germans, however, were not given the same choices dealing with education or career preference. Living in a Communist society, the rights and choices of individual people came second to that of the needs of the population as a whole. The Communist regime directed its citizens toward certain career paths, depending on what was deemed important or necessary in the community at that time. In other words, the East German government felt that their whole political and economic structure could only survive and prosper if all the citizens worked together as a team for the benefit of the Communist society. Personal wishes and desires concerning career choices were seen as unimportant. Not

surprisingly, this caused many East German citizens to work in areas that they might not have necessarily chosen for themselves.

The atmosphere for people living in West Germany was undoubtedly quite different from that of people living in the East. On a private level, West German citizens could feel free to speak to whomever they chose, without having to worry about what they were permitted to say. East Germans had justified concerns in this regard, since the Communist government used the East German Secret Police or Stasi to establish an extensive network of spies who were to watch all citizens, and to report any forbidden or suspicious activities. East Germans lived in constant fear of the possible presence of these government spies. Even more challenging was the fact, not fully realized until the opening of the Stasi files after reunification, that such spies could often be neighbours or friends. The regime regularly coerced people to keep a close watch over inhabitants under suspicion, and report back to Stasi officials. Failure to comply with such demands could result in getting into trouble with the government. Therefore, many East Germans did not know whom to trust or confide in, and had to be constantly on guard.

Another feature which limited personal freedom in East Germany were the government-supported groups and organizations for youth. For

instance, it was highly recommended by the regime that children join such organizations as the “Freie Deutsche Jugend”. The government felt it would benefit the Communist society if it could begin shaping the minds and views of its citizens along the lines of the Communist beliefs and principles at an early age. The aim was “...to mould people into a certain form of personality with a particular view of the world.”¹⁷ This was expected to help them build a stronger nation in the future. By contrast in West Germany, membership in youth organizations, whether based on religious, political or purely private interests, was left to the choice of the individual.

In light of the above-mentioned differences between East and West Germany, it is not difficult to understand why East Germany as a whole, and East Berlin in particular, were beginning to notice a loss in number of its people to the West, in particular its skilled and young workers. The living conditions in West Germany were simply better. On the material front alone, the West had much to offer that made it an attractive destination. And while many got used to the restrictions of their freedoms, others could not tolerate them.

The Communists found Berlin to be a weak spot in their long-range plans. For it was through Berlin that an overwhelming number of people

¹⁷ Mary Fulbrook, The Two Germanies 1945-1990 (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1992) 66.

under their rule were making their escape. Highly educated and trained specialists left as well, including “3,400 doctors, 17,000 teachers and 17,000 engineers.”¹⁸ Until all aspects of the Iron Curtain were almost impenetrable later on, there was rarely a train to be found travelling from East to West that did not contain its fair share of passengers wishing to move to the West. At this time, it was feared that unless strict measures were taken, there could be close to “four million East Germans¹⁹ travelling through Berlin and into the West by the end of a year”. With such an exodus of people fleeing the East, the Communist government began to feel the effect with regard to its plans for rebuilding its economic power. It became increasingly difficult to keep up the pace concerning the construction of homes and buildings, and the maintenance of properly run factories. The projected construction in East Berlin after the war took the form of “... prefabricated high-rise apartment blocks...”²⁰ in sufficient numbers to house approximately 100,000²¹ people. There was simply not enough manpower to carry out such plans, and to establish the GDR as a prosperous, self-sufficient country. Harsh countermeasures were therefore taken to slow the outward flow of its citizens.

¹⁸ Escape to West Germany, <<http://www.wall-berlin.org/gb/ciel-tex4.htm>>.

¹⁹ Norman Gelb, The Berlin Wall (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1986) 114.

²⁰ Colliers Encyclopedia, Vol. 4. New York: P.F. Collier, 1994: 77.

²¹ Ibid

In 1961, a new and more drastic plan was put in place by the Communists to prevent the outward flux of their citizens to the West. It was decided that barbed wire barriers would separate East Berlin from the Western Sectors. This dividing area would be closely patrolled, and the few crossing points between East and West were to be under strict control. This operation came into force during the early morning hours in August of 1961, when many East and West Germans were still asleep. It was a deliberately secretive mission that took everyone by surprise. Trains were immediately halted and people were made to stay away from the border on both sides, while the soldiers put the barbed wire in place. It is said that during this time in 1961, while the division of the city was under initial construction, the Communists used, "...all of the Stasi's 50,000 staff...,"²² whose duty it was to concentrate their energies on closing off the border in order to prevent any East Germans from escaping. When people on both sides of this partition saw the events unfolding before their eyes, they were in shock. Suddenly the realization came to East Berliners that they could no longer go to the West as they had done up to that time. A few still made it across during the first few hours of construction, and it is said that "... 5,500 East German

²² Erik Kirschbaum, "East Germany imprisoned more than 75,000 for trying to escape; report," National Post 8 August 2001.

border guards ...”²³ were arrested for trying to flee to the West over the barbed wire, while out of that number about 2,500²⁴ succeeded in their attempts. As time passed, however, the ‘Volkspolizei’, or People’s Police, guarding the border began to be much more effective. Even the Allies were taken by surprise by the developments, and at that time were unable and unwilling to do anything about the situation. It was feared that a new world war might break out if the Communists were challenged by the Western Allies over this issue. Gradually, the barbed wire was replaced by concrete blocks, marking the beginning of the construction of the Berlin Wall. For a short time, some of those people who resided in apartments and houses that were so close to the Western side that they could jump out of their windows and into the West, still managed to escape. However, this route was soon eliminated by officials, who ordered the windows of such houses filled in with bricks, or had these buildings demolished altogether.

Once the Communists thought they had the problem of out-migration under control, they tightened the leash on East Germans and began to use their power in even harsher ways than before the Wall was erected. People were called to court and were “... accused of defaming the state and its

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

leaders, or of assisting spies or slave traders in the West ... ”.²⁵ Often these accusations were weak, but were nevertheless used by the State to demonstrate to its citizens who was in control. More and more people were put under observation, interrogated, or put in prison for behaviour that was seen as inappropriate by the government.

East Berliners were now trapped on their own side of the city. At the very beginning of the development of the Wall, they were led to believe that access across the border would merely require a special permit. The East German police passed out leaflets to passengers from the East wishing to board a train to the West, stating that

citizens of the German Democratic Republic wishing to visit West Berlin would henceforth require special passes, which, ... could be obtained at their local police stations.²⁶

This information was unfortunately misleading. Except for a small number of East German intelligence officers who were permitted access to West Berlin for the purpose of spying, for the common East German citizen, “ no such special passes were available.”²⁷ It quickly became clear that crossing the border into the West to even visit family and friends was now going to

²⁵ Gelb 221.

²⁶ Gelb 152.

²⁷ Gelb 153.

prove much more difficult, if at all possible. Westerners were permitted to visit the East, but only with a visa, and under close, strict observation. They were questioned about the purpose of their visit, had to provide proper documentation, and had their vehicles checked for items that were forbidden by the Regime. Upon their return to the West, their cars were searched for possible escapees.

On occasion, there still would be those few brave or foolhardy enough to attempt to pass the Wall into freedom. Many failed at these efforts, and were either shot and killed, or retrieved and imprisoned. It has been estimated that during the years the Berlin Wall was in place "... 809 were killed trying to flee: 250 at the Berlin Wall, 370 on the German-German border, and another 189 who tried to escape East Germany via the Baltic Sea."²⁸ Even though the people in the East knew the dire consequences they would face if they were indeed caught trying to cross the border, their desperation of living under the strict power of the Communist regime caused many of them to risk their lives for a chance to make it to the West.

A second Wall was later erected in Berlin at some distance from the existing one, with a barren expanse of land in between, which became known as 'no man's land'. This area was patrolled by guards who were

²⁸ Kirschbaum

under orders to shoot anyone found in this strip of land. Security was further enhanced by the erection of, "... 285 elevated watchtowers..."²⁹ spotlights, sound alarms, and automatically-triggered guns. There were also landmines strategically placed and certain areas were being protected by ferocious guard dogs on long leashes left to roam up and down their given stretch and attack anyone found in this space. The Communist government tried to make it truly impossible for anybody to leave the German Democratic Republic, and the awareness of this situation weighed heavily on both East and West Germans.

In summary, the division of Berlin had an enormous impact on the lives of all German citizens. A once common culture was now being separated by a Wall. In Berlin friends and relatives were denied contact with those of their loved ones who lived on the other side of the city. The personal pain and loss of the affected individuals were undoubtedly tremendous. With a Communist form of government in power in the East, the life East Berliners once knew disappeared. Their economic situation continued to spiral downward, whereas the western side of the city, supported by funds and business incentives from the government of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in Bonn, quickly began to catch up

²⁹ Gelb 2.

with the other western countries of the world. It has been noted that the “... rebuilding of West Berlin was particularly dramatic in the decades following the erection of the Berlin Wall”,³⁰ undoubtedly because of a need to make this outpost of western lifestyle that was a culture viable and impressive. While many people escaped to the West during the turbulent years prior to the fortification of the Iron Curtain, others remained in the East because that was their home, or because they thought that somehow the situation could be changed over time. Many of these put their lives at great risk trying to improve their society.

Ingeborg Drewitz, the author under discussion, uses literature to focus on the life and fate of some of these people, giving her readers a better understanding of their outlook and circumstances.

³⁰ Colliers Encyclopedia 77.

Chapter 4

Translations

4.1.1 The Woman with the Black Headscarf

The woman wears a black headscarf, always, everyday, rain or shine, storm or not; a woman in whom nothing stands out but the scarf, which she ties under her chin, and the punctual way in which she goes every day from Albrecht Street in Berlin NW7 to the Schiffbauerdamm, where life has come to a standstill ever since the nocturnal bombing raids. Oblivious to everyone and everything around her, she leans into the gusts of wind and dust, instead of strolling through the narrow, dark, but busy streets of her own district like other old ladies, watching the anglers dipping their fishing rods into the oily water of the Spree river and chewing on their tobacco pipes, or instead of listening to the housewives complain about bad times, but suddenly fall silent when they look up at the train station Friedrichstrasse, which only a few weeks ago had been the trans-shipment center of a large city, a luminous glass palace in the evening. It is still a luminous glass palace at night, but now a closely guarded gate that controls the transit between East and West Berlin, admitting a privileged few commuters and the West German visitors, the terminal for a meaningless

ten-minute traffic between East and West. The worries of the housewives, fishermen, neighbours, and of those from the opposite side, the traders, lowly employees, chorus girls, their suitors in polo-neck sweaters, the old stage workers and landladies - these all must mean nothing to her. Nor do complaints about the lost illusion of the omnipotence of the theatre, created by years of nightly line-ups of cars from West Berlin in front of the theatre by the Schiffbauerdamm. The Berlin Ensemble is still playing, but there are no more cars since the end of August, and the young people are missing, those who had come by city train; the ticket scalpers have also disappeared, just like the enjoyable stroll along the row of cars by the banks of the Spree river, and the conversations in front of the theatre during the intermission.

An old woman with a white, motionless face does not count for much in such an area with a claim to cosmopolitan flair. Those who live there are too preoccupied with themselves, with their disappointments and the pathos of those in the vicinity of the theatre. They just shrug their shoulders when they see her emerge from Albrecht Street at four o'clock. But the woman does not mind. She does not even turn to look at the gulls that followed her through the railroad bridge and then are blown back by the wind. She walks as if dazed by the rusty-red clouds of the autumn afternoon. She does not hear the venetian blind bang against the window opening in the remnant of a

wall, nor the rescue boat tearing on its chain. Who should rescue anyone here anyway, here where nobody lives? She does not see the striped cat lying in wait for the gull on the iron post of the railing along the riverbank, a senseless wait, for if the cat jumped it would end up in the water! She does not see the children kneel on the sidewalk, drawing the Wall with chalk.

“If you go over there, they call out: Stop! If you go further, they shoot. “Treason!” the bigger boy suddenly shouts, extending his left arm, holding the right one at an angle, close in front of his eyes. “Treason! Escape attempt! Bang!” - “Dead”. The other boy claps his hands. The rusty-red sky is marked with intense violet shadows. The woman dodges the children on the road. Does she see them after all? Hear them after all?

“That is the mother!” says one of the girls, and puts her finger on her lips.

“Bang”, shouts the big boy again, putting his hands on his hips and laughing, because the girl spits at his feet and follows the woman for a few steps. The cat, startled, stretches, arches its back, and then crosses the roadway, heading back into the ruins. The gull does not move.

The boy stretches out his left arm again, holding his right one at an angle close in front of his eyes, and pulls his lips apart to produce a sound

like a bang. The other boy mimics this, before they dash away into the ruins, where they built shelters from pieces of brick and wall.

The woman walks on, bent over, her face like a white mask, her shoes worn; she is not concerned about the bad state of the pavement, she walks as if facing an invisible obstacle. Every afternoon. For weeks, every afternoon, although by now it is already getting dark between four and five o'clock. She crosses the Neue Wilhelm Street, continues ten or twenty more steps along the bank of the Spree river, until she can clearly recognize the Wall over there, the border police and the barbed wire. Then she always stops, not suddenly, but rather with some hesitation, as if she were confronting a buffer. She takes two or three more steps, briefly touches her forehead, then holds on to the iron railing of the wall along the bank. Sometimes one of the employees of the BEWAG company watches her from the administration building on the Neue Wilhelm Street, as he bends over his ledgers, and says to his colleagues, "Time to knock off work soon, the black one is giving her performance again." But they do not laugh when she tilts back her head, lets her hands slump down, and submits herself to the wind, rain, or the rusty red evening light, for several minutes, far too long for the watching employees, because they have to balance the books by the end of the work-day. When by chance one of them looks out of the window again, the woman has untied

her headscarf, and lets it flutter like a black flag from her out-stretched arm. Then she pulls herself together, ties up her scarf again, and abruptly turns around to go back where she came from. The employees stack their bills, put them in binders, and file them silently with pinched lips. Sometimes one of them still sees how she crosses the bridge to the other bank of the river near the Reichstag. Only the windows at the back of the post office over there show light this early in the evening. He soon loses sight of her.

Hours later, after the theatre performance has begun, the woman with the black headscarf emerges from the Weidendammer Bridge, walks along the Schiffbauerdamm, finishing the circle of her journey at the corner of Albrecht Street. Whoever happens to see her does not ask where she had been all those hours. She must have gone crazy! - that is what those who notice the automatic regularity of her comings and goings think. She probably cannot sleep unless she is dead tired and sore from walking! This is the opinion of a few compassionate souls behind their windows.

The next day at exactly four o'clock, she again steps out from the Albrecht Street. Her eyes roam over the granite steps, which join the pedestrian zone under the city railway bridge to the street, where women customarily have waited for their husbands and mothers for their children who took the shortcut from the train station Friedrichstrasse. She hesitates,

as if shivering from the cold, then her face turns rigid; she turns to the right like yesterday, the day before yesterday and every other day. The gulls follow her, until the wind behind the bridge blows them back, cobblestones and sloping slabs of granite remain behind as she walks on, sloping slabs of granite with faded blades of grass in between. Faded blades of grass.

That is how it began.

She adjusts her stride so that she steps on the blades of grass. That is how it began: that her boy, the only one left to her after the war, saw the grass between the cobblestones on the grounds of the factory. Released from his POW-camp, he still had the desire to become an actor, just like he did as a boy. It had been taken for granted that he, as the third child, would have nothing to do with the factory, and already as a student he had been able to indulge in his passion for the theater. And now the grass grows between the cobblestones on the factory grounds. Merten, who had taken his master's exams, was killed in the war; Günter, who had studied bookkeeping, planning, and marketing, was missing. The factory machines had all been deported after the defeat. Father had rented an outmoded lathe, but the orders he got did not even cover the rent. Father, who had taken over the tool factory that his grandfather had already owned, was a broken man, but he did not want to give up. Rudolf no longer spoke of his wish to

become an actor. He had stepped on the grass that now grew in the courtyard, stopping in the narrow space that had been detached from the hall in order to watch the worker sweeping up wood shavings. His sweeping movements made him look busy, it was midday, the man wanted to kill time, since real work no longer existed. That very afternoon Rudolf had put together the list of their old customers. Two months later he had convinced his father to give up the large apartment on the Schiffbauerdamm, and to sell the property, which two generations had nursed to prosperity. Three years later the factory had worked profitably again; in the fourth year his father had been accused of an economic crime against the State, and the factory had been expropriated; when father returned from custody, he hanged himself in the storeroom next to the kitchen, where they now lived. Rudolf had been an employee then, just like the others in the factory hall. After his father's funeral, he took the books he had acquired and rented a place a few houses further down. He now wanted to take acting lessons after all, and said that he needed peace and quiet to study his roles. But it was probably due to the grass between the cobblestones of the factory that he missed the boat, and did not manage to find a job as an actor. She hardly even said hello to him whenever she met him on the street in his shabby clothing, because she was ashamed, and because it was so painful to remember a

young woman who thirty years ago had walked along these same streets with her well-dressed sons. Rudolf had always worn white knee socks at that time, and on Sundays a velvet jacket, because during her third pregnancy she had so very much looked forward to having a girl. Now he walked around in baggy pants and a felt jacket. She could hardly stand it, and yet every couple of days she wrapped a bowl of food in a cloth and carried it to him a few houses away. And every couple of months, she used her small pension to buy him a white shirt. She was afraid for him. Why had he not gone to the West, after the expropriation of the factory and his father's unfortunate end? Why did he stay? She did not know anything about him, yet she stayed for his sake, even when the letters from her old acquaintances over there in West Germany did not hide the joy over their own success, and asked again and again: Why don't you do what so many are doing?

One afternoon, at a time she normally never went to his place, she met eight or ten young people there. Even though it was summer, the windows were closed. This meant they had something to discuss with each other which nobody outside should hear! Is that why Rudolf stayed? He asked her to come back later, and smiled at her in such a strange mysterious way that she had trouble turning away from him without having given him a hug.

Two hours later he was alone, the room aired out, the ashtrays emptied, and the table pushed back to its proper place.

“You want an account, Mom?”

Rudolf had sat down across from her on a stool, resting his elbows on his knees. His hair was getting thin at the back of his head. She wanted to bury his head in her hands, but she did not dare.

“You are surprised that I do not go across the border a couple of hundred meters from here. An actor without a job, yes, without credentials, an unskilled worker, but an expropriated heir, therefore someone with at least some privileges over there. Or, to be more precise: It embarrasses you that I do not have some sort of career.”

She remembered the bowls of food wrapped in cloths, the small talk about the worn shirt collars, the resoling of his shoes, the weather. Yes, he was right, she was disappointed in him. She suffered because he did not respect her demand for modest prosperity, and because his name was on none of the theater posters. And of all places in this part of the city, where some people might still remember his father and grandfather, and the young woman with the three well-dressed sons. She folded her hands, resolved to listen. He explained that he had volunteered for a year at the Schiffbauerdamm-Theatre, because he wanted to learn how to agree to what

they advocated on stage; that he had learned a great deal during that year, for instance, that injustice which happens to an individual does not matter. And that because of that he had left after the arrest of a young female colleague.

“Maybe I am not a real actor, someone who still makes his appearance on stage even when the people collapse and die in their seats, or when the walls become engulfed in flames,” he said, “Still, you do understand why I gave up?”

He did not wait for the reply. Maybe she would not have been able to ask: And what are you doing now? Not able to say it out of fear that it might sound like an accusation, or let him sense the bitterness in her. And you? Meaning: You fool, you thirty-six year old fool! She had listened to him, as he told her about the young people, who had gradually gathered around him, because all of them suffered under the pressure of public opinion in their jobs, and did not know how else to live than in rejection of the misery which politics brought on each individual and family.

“And what do you live on?” she quickly interrupted, because she suddenly had the distinct feeling that she was sitting across from a stranger.

Rudolf sized her up with a grim look on his face.

“I am the master of ceremonies. I sell newspapers!”

He laughed out loud.

“These newspapers?”

She got up slowly and pressed her lips together. It had occurred to her that by now he could have been married and the father of two or three children, someone who went to the office every day, and at night found responsibility and refuge with his family. She had left without saying good-bye. But she had continued to bring him warm meals. She had not understood him until he had asked her to look after a woman in the house next door whose husband had died while incarcerated. He sold newspapers, in order to receive and relay messages. Now she often waited for him by the steps of the pedestrian bridge, where other women also waited after work. Sometimes she accompanied him selling newspapers. He shouted the headlines, occasionally adding his own comments:” But RIAS³¹ says the opposite! Therefore RIAS is lying”. Many understood the bad joke, since they all listened to the forbidden radio station; while others remained silent. But again and again there was someone among the customers who recognized him by the joke and who whispered to him: Luisen Street number four, second story left, or: Oranienburger Street one, four floors up. Then they would go there in the evening or the next day, to those who needed advice or help.

³¹ ‘RIAS’ refers to a Western Radio Station, ‘Rundfunk im Amerikanischen Sektor.’

Rudolf had many friends, many who nodded to him surreptitiously, many who trusted him. Too many, she feared, and also that his reputation might grow too much one day, and that the next train station or the couple hundred meters to the border might then be too far for him. But she did not ask: When are you leaving?

In the summer of 1961, he brought her some children a few times, children who had become separated from their parents during the escape, and whom she then took across the border to the West. She did not ask any questions, she followed his instructions. On her return trip by city train or subway the thought did occur to her that people in her building and on her street would be puzzled about these children she had as guests. But when she looked into the tired faces of all those who returned to the Eastern Sector, the fathers who worked in the West, the women who had been shopping in the West, it comforted her to be one of the many who still remained and had not yet given up, and who surely were also known by the people on their streets, and were being watched as well.

Then Rudolf came with the news that the border had been closed. He dropped the newspaper bag full of Sunday editions. The two girls from Mecklenburg he had brought to her late Sunday night began to cry. Their mother had probably been taken off the train by controllers. They had not

seen her again at the East station, and they had then got lost, thanks to some wrong information, or because they had been too scared to ask for directions. Rudolf had found them completely exhausted. She had made them some soup that night, and the children had slept for a long time. The older one had just told her that her father already had a job in the West, and a furnished room. And now it had happened, the dreaded event they had feared for weeks but had refused to believe. The children cried. Rudolf admonished them, "Be quiet! Someone could hear you! For God's sake, do be quiet!" Suddenly she knew that he was just as helpless as the whimpering children. She had poured him a cup of tea, as he knelt down on the floor to refold the newspapers. He had drunk one mouthful and had left in a hurry. She had watched him from behind the window. His arms were flailing, jerking in an unfamiliar way. Then she had to calm down the children, children she did not know, who would end up going to a state orphanage, whether or not their mother had succeeded in making her escape. How many of these children had she taken across the border in the last few weeks? She did not know anymore. Was it ten? Was it twelve? They all had trusted her, and almost all of them had hurried to their mothers without saying good-bye when the camp director in Marienfelde had called for them.

Then she had gone back to the East, with the many nameless people who all did not want to give up, and who would all know at this time that it was all over, that those who had silently watched them from behind doors and windows had triumphed now, that it had been in vain to put up resistance.

She had hugged the children, and all three of them had cried.

But it is alarming that tears run dry and nothing changes. That children still had to have lunch and warm blankets for the night. Their clothes had to be washed, hair brushed, and fingernails cut. Nothing changes. Nothing.

Rudolf sold his newspapers, Rudolf met with many people, but he did not find a solution for the children. Every lunchtime he now came to her in the kitchen, she no longer needed to cover the bowl of food with a cloth and bring it to him. There were moments when she was grateful that they now both sat at the table together, counting with the children, letting them write out dictations or play picture games, because it was hard for the children to stay quiet without some activity. Yet somebody must have noticed that the children were still with her, school-age children, at a time when the holidays were over. This somebody had passed on the news, and she was asked to register them with the police within three days, or to return them to their

legal guardians. Rudolf had anticipated this possibility. He had found out that the children's father lived in Dortmund, but according to the existing laws, being a fugitive from the East German Republic he did not have any rights regarding them.

“So they have to go over the wall,” Rudolf had said one evening, as the children slept. “If I still have enough time left, maybe I will find a legal way. I would not like to expose their lives to the mortal danger of an escape under the present circumstances, but if it should become urgent, call these people at the Baumschulenweg. Take note of the number, I cannot write it down. A young man and a young woman will come after your call, and pick up the children. Make sure that the girls are friendly to them, and that the people on the street see the departure. It would be best if you accompanied them, like a grandmother would accompany her children and grandchildren”.

So she went to the telephone booth and dialed the number. Around noon the young couple came, and the five of them set out to take a stroll through the city center. The children were very excited, because they were finally out on the street again. They got ice cream and candy, they went to the fairy tale fountain in Friedrichshain, they ate grilled sausages at a fair, and rode the merry-go-round and Ferris wheel. Nobody spoke about what they were planning to do. They said good-bye at a streetcar station. The

young people asked her to give their regards to Rudolf. The children did not want to let go of her at all. Then she stood and waved, as the streetcar moved away. Sometimes in dreams one will stand like that and wave, wave in order to fight back the fear of being absorbed into the hollow space around you. She did not remember how she got home. The door to the kitchen was not quite closed, perhaps she had forgotten to lock it, the latch never did close properly. She remembered that she had not cooked any potatoes for Rudolf. She placed the basket on the table, took the kitchen knife out of the drawer, poured water into the earthenware pot. She smelled the earth on the skins of the potatoes, she peeled them in a spiral as always, she cut up the potato and put it into the water, and took the next one out of the basket. Someone stood outside her door. "Rudolf!" She called. The door was slowly pushed open. It was the old man who lived one floor above her, whom she heard ranting sometimes, because he liked to drink. Even his clothing smelled of liquor. She felt disgusted. Once again she was ashamed of her misery, she was ashamed again that Rudolf sold newspapers instead of having a proper job, and she was ashamed again because of the life she had lost.

"Don't you know?" asked the old man.

She took the third potato out of the basket. She did not want to speak to someone like him. He moved close to the table, pushed the basket away from the edge, and supported himself with his hands. She peeled slowly, wafer-thin, a clean spiral.

“They’ve got your son, missus, they’ve got your son.”

“How? What?”

The old fellow hooked a thumb in his coat pocket. “This afternoon.”

All at once her room was full of people, all strange people, no not really, she knew their faces, neighbours, people from the neighbourhood. The voices lunged at her.

“They looked for him! Over there, where he lives, and here, in the cellar and in the attic and in the ruins. Someone must have snitched on him, for some reason. That’s why they went all out to get him. “Whether they shot him, nobody knows, but he hung limp in their arms as if they did”.

The voices still lunged at her, excited, whispering, curious. Who? What? Finally something is happening. Did they shoot him, or not?

The third potato was peeled. She looked for the basket to take out the fourth, but the basket had slid to the other end of the table.

Slowly she grasped the situation. Rudolf was arrested. Not Rudolf, too! She did not comprehend anything else. Then she must have screamed.

The room emptied. Even the old man with the smell of liquor left, but stopped at the door.

“I only wanted to say, missus, it wasn’t one of us. Maybe you had to call somewhere and the phone was bugged. Or, well, you know, quite a lot of people knew your son.”

The door clicked shut. The hands with the potato peeler lay in her lap, a knife with black spots, sharp, pointy. Why does it lie so still? Why?

That was many weeks ago. One time Rudolf wrote: “You must not worry,” he wrote, “the food is quite filling.” The next news she got was signed by a doctor. Rudolf is dead. Blood in his kidneys. And the children also wrote to her, that they lived in a home now, and had become Young Pioneers, and had bunk beds. She sent them the fairy tale picture game, since now they would learn quite different games, and they will forget the fairy tales, the ones in which children and parents are always reunited.

Every afternoon at four o’clock, she goes down to the Spree river. At that time, shortly after four o’clock, it was supposed to have happened. In the beginning, she looked in the ruins for the spot, but nobody helped her, and she never found any sign of a hide-away. Now she walks past the ruins, the gulls follow her until they are blown back by the wind behind the railway bridge. The venetian blind flaps, the rescue boat tears at its chain,

and a striped cat stretches and arches its back as she passes. She crosses the Neue Wilhelm Street, another ten, twenty steps further along the riverbank, then she unties her scarf and lets it blow in the wind.

Over there, across the Spree, you can see the Wall, the guards at their post. She ties her scarf again. Nobody can see her face while she ties it.

And then she turns around, and begins her long journey until nighttime.

4.1.2 Commentary

The story, *The Woman with the Black Headscarf*, takes place in Berlin, just prior to the border closing, separating East and West. It is through the present and remembered activities of the title figure, the woman with a black headscarf, that we see the events of the story unfold.

Ingeborg Drewitz has utilized the presence of a central mother figure in some of her other works, most notably the novels *Das Eis auf der Elbe* and *Wer verteidigt Katrin Lambert?* These novels, like the story *The Woman with the Black Headscarf*, focus on "... the mother whose perspective dominates the plot and narrative development."³² This concept certainly relates to Rudolf's mother, for it is through her eyes and her perspective that the reader comes to an understanding of the story and the development of the plot that forms its background.

The author uses a very interesting technique in the beginning portion of this story in that the first six pages are solely dedicated to this central figure. The reader is introduced to this mysterious woman, who appears somewhat puzzling and odd at first, as we follow her through the streets of East Berlin on what is apparently a daily walking ritual for her. Drewitz

³² Monika Sharfi, "Die überforderte Generation: Mutterfiguren in Romanen von Ingeborg Drewitz," *Women-In-German-Yearbook: -Feminist-Studies-in-German-Literature-and-Culture* 7 (1991): 23.

uses the introduction in this manner to arouse interest and curiosity in her readers, as we wonder who this lady is, and about the significance of her strange actions. Great attention is given to her behaviour and surroundings. Only after our full attention is directed at this seemingly strange figure, does Drewitz turn back to the past, to give us the background information on her, and how she relates to the story overall: "That is how it began."

Women writers after World War II are noticeably displaying more self-confidence in their literary works than their predecessors. The way in which some of them are portraying themselves in literature has evolved from being merely the objects³³ of male affection to taking on more of an active role in the story. Drewitz' story *The Woman with the Black Headscarf* is an example of this progression since the female figure, Rudolf's mother, is the central character in the piece, playing an important part in the story.

The events surrounding the lives of Rudolf and his mother after the division of Germany is the main focus of the story. The old woman continues to stay in the East, even though now it had been brought to her attention by friends living in the West that better living conditions and more opportunities await both her and her son just across the border. She decides to stay because of Rudolf, who apparently had ample opportunity to flee to

³³ Ingeborg Drewitz, "The Contribution of Women Authors to the Discovery of People of Female Sex in German-Speaking Literature since 1945," *Studies-in-Twentieth-Century-Literature* 9.2 (1985): 299.

the West, but instead chose to remain in the East, in order to aid those adversely affected by the Communist government and the partition of the country, and also to help others who wish to cross over to the western side of the city. This includes reuniting families, especially children with their parents who may have gotten separated or lost during an escape attempt. His lowly job as a newspaper vendor, at first a source of shame for his mother, in fact serves as a cover for receiving and distributing messages from those who need his help.

Throughout the development of the story, Drewitz describes several circumstances which show how the East-West division impacted people's lives on a particularly personal level. First of all, we learn that the central figure in the story has lost everything that she loved and valued. The war and its aftermath had a profound effect on her family, not unlike many others at this time. In spite of the confiscation of his machinery by the Russian occupation force, the head of the family had tried, and almost succeeded, in rebuilding his formerly flourishing company, before he was disowned on presumably false charges. He took his own life because he could not bear the disgrace. Her son Merten had been killed in the war, and her second son, Günter, were missing and presumed dead. Near the end of the story, when it becomes clear that Rudolf is also killed, we notice that this

final incident causes her to lose her mind. In a mindless ritual she now wanders through the streets of Berlin as if in a trance. The physical and more importantly, the mental strain that she was exposed to not only during but also even after the war, were more than she could handle, causing her emotional breakdown.

Present observations serve to trigger memories, which in turn help to fill out the picture. The shabby way in which Rudolf now dresses causes his mother to reminisce about better times, when she was a young mother taking her three little well-dressed boys for walks. Now when she sees her son on the street, she feels embarrassed. Rudolf used to wear a velvet jacket, while now, as a grown man, he can only afford to wear one made of felt. She had once been proud of how her sons looked, and how many people recognized the family and their successful business. This pride is difficult for her to abandon, so she spends what little money she has to buy Rudolf a new shirt, on occasion, so he could at least look more presentable.

The story also illustrates how the children living in East Berlin at this time of uncertainty and upheaval were affected by the division. Despite their young age, they were nevertheless aware of the happenings around them. We see this when the old lady passes a group of children in the street, who are playing border guards, instead of the traditional games most

children would play under normal circumstances. One pretends to shoot the other, using such words as “ treason”, “ bang”, and “ dead”, which represent the atmosphere these children were exposed to in the shadow of the Berlin Wall.

Later, in the ‘flash-back’ part of the story, we encounter two children who were unsuccessful in crossing over to the West to join their father and, were put in government-run orphanages. These establishments had full reign to impose the beliefs and values of the regime on the impressionable, young minds of the children. They had to join youth organizations such as the Young Pioneers, where the ideals of the state were firmly planted. It is no doubt for this reason that the old lady felt it necessary to send the children a game with pictures of the fairy tales she used to read to them, to remind them that happy endings are those whereby children are reunited with their parents.

Drewitz also uses other subtle ways to show the reader what the situation and atmosphere were like in East Germany at this time, thus providing the reader with a better picture of how life in Berlin looked and felt. For instance, the fact that Rudolf and his mother have to carefully plan the ways for the children they helped, to cross the border into the West, even before the erection of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, tells us how

difficult it was for people to move freely throughout their own country. The city transit system is restricted in arbitrary fashion, and people's movements are observed, making it difficult for family members to visit one another, let alone for potential refugees to make their escape.

In passing, the author also draws our attention to the physical appearance of the city. Through the eyes of Rudolf's mother we see rubble, ruins, and in one particularly memorable scene, a venetian blind hitting against a gaping window opening, the remnant of a house. It stands for the many homes and buildings that were destroyed during the bombing and final battle for the city, and unlike in West Berlin, the Eastern part remained in this desolate state for a very long time.

Rudolf's mother also walks by a rescue boat that no longer serves any purpose, since few people live in that area any longer. There were once probably many people who resided there, but have since moved away due to the circumstances and priorities of a divided city.

On several occasions we are told of the poor condition of the cobblestones, which now have grass growing in between them. This is another indirect reminder of the deterioration found in post-war East Germany, and the economic destitution faced by many establishments. Thus it is mentioned that Rudolf's family business had once been quite prosperous

and had spanned several generations, but now it has been expropriated and consequently is barely in operation, as demonstrated by the factory worker who is seen sweeping the floor, trying to look busy when in fact he was not. The condition of the grounds surrounding the factory appears unkept and neglected, while in the past, when Rudolf's family still owned and operated it, it had evidently been very prosperous.

Indirectly we also see that the arts felt the affects of the division as well. Drewitz' story refers to the theatre 'Am Schiffbauerdamm', which was once very active and well known. Now the number of patrons has drastically declined, since the well-to-do western visitors can no longer attend. Later, through Rudolf, we hear about the restrictions put on actors and writers, and what they were allowed to perform and bring forth to the public. Rudolf, who had long dreamed of becoming an actor, volunteered for a period of time in the theatre, but did not like what he saw. Having witnessed the unfair treatment of his colleagues and the arrest of one of them, he left the theatre.

In the story, there are several scenes in which we see the old woman preparing meals for her son. We note the emphasis on potatoes, often viewed as a staple food in difficult economic times. We can therefore

assume that it is reflective of the limited types of goods available to people in the East.

Drewitz uses several instances of colour symbolism in her story as well. The old woman is mentioned on different occasions as wearing a black headscarf. The colour black brings many images to mind, such as mystery, death, destruction, and mourning. This woman appears to be very mysterious to her fellow citizens, who often wonder why she walks the streets of Berlin on a daily basis. She resembles a shadow that appears when darkness begins to set in, in the late afternoon. By wearing black, she seems to blend in with her surroundings, thus enabling her to do what she does unobtrusively. At times, she unties her black headscarf and lets it blow in the wind like a flag. This flag-like headscarf can be representative of death and destruction, which is evident throughout her city. Germany as a whole, and Berlin in particular, had suffered tremendously and had a large number of casualties during the war, falling victim to bombing raids and destruction. Black is of course also associated with mourning, which is no doubt the reason why this lady chooses to wear this colour. She has lost her entire family, and the life she once knew has disappeared forever. It could also be symbolic of how she feels now that her city has been divided, and many people are separated from their loved ones. By allowing her headscarf to

flutter in the wind near the Berlin Wall, she may be demonstrating her disgust and hatred of the situation to the border guards, and of the presence of the Wall in general, her black object symbolizing the depressed spirit of those individuals trapped in the East.

The colour of the woman's face appears to be rather pale and white in comparison with her black headscarf. It seems as if she is wearing a white mask in order not to be recognized, enabling her to check in the ruins like a transparent ghost, whom nobody can see. Even as she walks by the mentioned group of playing children, she almost floats past them without giving them a look. Only gradually after following the woman's puzzling progress through the ruined city, do we learn about the circumstances that can explain her mask-like appearance.

Drewitz' allusions and metaphors are rarely obvious and explicit. For instance, on the surface the mention of a tiger-striped cat encountered by the old lady on her walk along the banks of the river on the surface seems to be no more than a descriptive detail. But since the image occurs again at a later point in the story, one has to suspect that it has a deeper meaning. Two possibilities come to mind, one might see a parallel between the cat observing its potential prey, ready to pounce, comparable to the manner in which the East German government kept its citizens under surveillance,

ready to exercise its power at any given moment. Or alternatively, the repeated reference to the tiger-like appearance of the cat could evoke a caged tiger in a zoo. Such imprisoned animals often show disturbing movements, pacing back and forth in their cages as if in a trance. Their main focus appears to be concentrated on escaping their present situation. Maybe we can make a mental connection to the compulsive circuit of the old woman through East Berlin, a repetition of useless actions on a daily basis, its invariable high point her physical confrontation of the Wall, as if it were the bars of a cage or prison she cannot escape.

Although mother and son are involved in dangerous, even heroic activities helping people escape to the West, Drewitz humanizes her characters in such a way that they can represent “every man” in the East during this time. The author uses the technique of purposely omitting names of several figures in the story. It is therefore noteworthy that neither the woman with the black headscarf nor her deceased husband are given personal names, although we learn the names of their three sons. This technique enables us to see her as a representative of many others in similar circumstances. Her situation and reaction could symbolize different scenarios people were faced with after the war and the division of the country. After all, many a mother lost her sons due to the war and its

aftermath. Likewise, Rudolf's father could stand for many other businessmen who had their livelihood taken away by the government. Although not all reacted in that drastic way of committing suicide, it was certainly a distinct possibility.

Yet these characters, for all their generalized meaning, are no cardboard figures, but show their human traits and emotions. On discovering that the border has officially been sealed off, Rudolf becomes frustrated, irritated, and leaves the house with his hands trembling and shaking. We also realize that his mother has unconditional love for him. Even though he disappoints her in various aspects, she continues to bring him warm meals and worries about his well-being. When mother and son meet in his apartment, they appear to be a little uncomfortable in each other's presence, almost nervous in some respects. The display of these emotions shows the reader that they are not flawless, but react like ordinary people. Nevertheless Rudolf and his mother can be looked upon as heroes in this story, because of the sacrifices they make for others. They ignore the possibilities of escape while this is still feasible, and remain in the East continuing to help their fellowmen, risking their lives in the process. Again, one can see their actions as representative of those of many other Germans who did the same, even when they had opportunities to move to the West

and start a new life. They stood up for what they believed in, even if it meant disobeying the laws of their government, and being arrested.

Reading Drewitz' stories, the reader often finds it necessary to pay attention not only to the information provided by her, but perhaps more importantly to what is merely implied, and left for one to decipher and interpret. Such is the case with the circumstances of Rudolf's death. His death certificate stated that he died of blood in his kidneys. Since there was no previous mention of him having any medical problems, one can presume that he had been beaten in jail, damaging his kidneys, which in turn caused his death. Another example can be seen in the episode of the last group of children Rudolf wanted to rescue. Since they later write to the woman, telling her that they are now part of the 'Young Pioneers', we can infer that the attempt to bring them to the West had failed, and that officials must have brought them back to the East, where they are now wards of the State. Also, it appears that Rudolf must have been under suspicion for some time, and that his actions were eventually reported to the police, resulting in his arrest. Such instances of Drewitz' style confront the reader with small challenges; but they also contribute to the richness of her work.

4.2.1 The One by My Side

The searchlights erect walls of white light in the night. Deer get caught in these searchlight walls. He still remembers that from riding his motorcycle. Suddenly deer had stared at him, stood there, as if under a spell, ears straight up.

Step on it! Something told him, knock them down! But he had put on the brakes. The jolt had thrown Margot against him, but the animals had bolted out of the light with one jump, saved, and had been swallowed by the darkness next to the road. Margot had cried with her face against his back. He thinks of this, every time, when he is on night duty, of the warmth between his shoulder blades, and of the empty road, and how Margot had thanked him afterwards that he had spared the animals. Although it was clear that had he not slowed down, they would have had a bad accident, and it would have been more logical for Margot to thank him for saving her own life and limbs.

But it makes him sentimental to think of that experience: it helps him tolerate the waiting. Waiting for time ticking by, for being replaced, for receiving mail, and he waits for that just like the others, because in the district on the outskirts of Berlin, where they have been on duty for weeks

now, nothing ever happens which might demand their attention. Those over there behind the border ignore them when they push open their windows in the morning, and start up their cars, pump up bicycle tires, or go to the bus stop. They also ignore them when they return in the evenings, when they return expected by their wives, jumped on by their children. During the mornings, when the women lug their shopping nets and bags, unable to take their children by the hand, they admonish them when they point with their fingers in our direction. And every ten minutes, when a new bus has completed the loop of the last stop, and the driver and conductor replace the driver and conductor of the previous bus, who wait on the sunny bench, they turn their backs on us, every single time. There is nobody who looks this way, nobody who notices them at their post behind the barbed wire fence and the ploughed strip of ground. It seems as if doing one's duty meant nothing, along with the question and answer game they underwent during their instruction lessons. Guards at the border of peace, what are you going to do if the one next to you betrays himself as an enemy agent? If someone tries to break through from the terrain at your rear? If you are being attacked? If you are being provoked? If...if...

They wait. For relief, for the mail, and for the possibility that this transparent yet impermeable wall of indifference shatters; wait that the

searchlights begin to move, ending the silence in which they are trapped, as they walk along next to each other. Guards on duty. They barely recognize one another. Only the smell of leather, breath, a pipe-smoker's breath, and that's why he knows the name of the one by his side: Sigurd. Nothing more than that. He has no idea where he comes from, what he has trained for; what he thinks. Sigurd, that is a name the Nazis used to give their sons. Ridiculous. Does the guy next to him have any idea what his name means? Sigurd, the happy hero! Later, when they are married and are expecting a child, he will talk it over with Margot, how ridiculous it is to want to influence the destiny of future children through the choice of a name. He will describe his present partner to her, who is chubby, and who during their lessons either chews on a pencil or participates with conspicuous eagerness; and he will describe to her the legendary Sigurd, as he is still described in the school books of his older sisters; boyishly daring, indifferent to women's passions, deaf to danger. But he does not succeed in visualizing Margot's face. Maybe she would find the comparison boring, perhaps she would now be more determined to name her son Sigurd, who knows. He does not succeed in imagining the marriage with Margot, the future, which after all can surely be figured out: first, second, third promotion, own apartment, own office. He can list these steps like one would list the data of a stranger's life.

There will always be someone next to him, who has some name or other and is of no concern to him, but that is no reason to spit in his face or shove him aside, because one has to be there for the other, because each one is responsible for the other. That is what they say in class.

A shuddering tree startles Sigurd next to him. But he does not stop walking, in fact he does not even look around. Right left right left, the ground is uneven, it muffles their steps. However, there was indeed a sound, and behind the wall of searchlights they wait to attack, as instructed in their lessons. He cannot imagine that those over on the other side wait for anything other than the end of night. The sling of the rifle presses into his shoulder. He stretches in order to shift the weight of the weapon. If only he could take it from his shoulder, shoot into that white wall, to destroy it! A tree shudders! Don't you hear it? That must surely be something, if a tree shudders on a windless night!

But he remains silent. They turn at the usual spot, the weapon knocks against his thigh. Again the tree shudders. Sigurd's face is sharply outlined before the white wall: the helmet, the nose, tightly pressed lips. Why can he not tap him on the shoulder and whisper to him: Hey, do you not hear anything? Something is going on with that tree! Perhaps the tree is hiding an owl, which the light disturbs, or a deer. I had deer in the spotlight once, I

let them go, you understand. Do you understand that?

The weapon knocks against him with every step. He walks next to the other one, not knowing anything about him but his name.

That is the signal! The tree! Someone has grabbed the branch. We are ready, it means. Are you?

Sigurd should have spoken with his partner on guard, should have persuaded him to take part in the plan. Over there, they would take in members of the border guards, surely he had heard of that. But Sigurd was not quite sure whether today was already new moon. The silence of the one by his side irritated him. Already our fathers built ditches and put up wire fences and rammed in anti-tank obstacles - that's how he could have begun-, we don't want that anymore, let's get the wire-cutters! But the silence of the other one irritated him, because it is impossible to know what he thinks. That one is silent even when they lie on the palliasses and crack jokes; supposedly he comes from some God-forsaken little village in the Fläming area; they are said to be a bit strange there, because the earth yields nothing but pine trees and heather. What does a person like that think? Who is he really? They keep their distance. The ground muffles the sound of their steps. They listen.

Who is the one by his side? Who – is – the - other?

Sigurd never had to ask that question previously.

He still remembers his first scouting game with the Young Pioneers. At home the relatives had been gathered to eat their fill of cake, because it was his tenth birthday. Mother had scolded him when he left, but he had known his way around the hiding places of farms and ruins better than all the other boys, and not missed a single trail. The boys had put their trust in him, and at the sing-along at the end of the game he felt as if a load was lifted off his shoulders. The mediocre life of his parents and his relatives did not concern him anymore. Almost all of them had had some kind of minor job with the Nazis, and since that time they no longer cared about politics. They had wanted to force him to sit at the coffee table with them, and prevent him from becoming a Young Pioneer. Those at the top just need flunkies, his father said, and his mother had not given him the Pioneer shirt that he had wanted for his birthday. But someone in the neighborhood had lent him his shirt. He had to burst out laughing in the middle of singing, because it had been so easy to evade his parents' wishes. And since that time, he had no longer asked for permission whenever he went on duty as a Young Pioneer, and later as a member of the FDJ³⁴; he also had not consulted them before he registered for the People's Police. Then his

³⁴ 'FDJ' refers to 'Freie Deutsche Jugend', the communist youth organization.

mother had appeared with an apple pie in her bag, to congratulate him on his initiation, and to celebrate with him!

No, he had never asked: Who is the other? He never had to ask it.

He had also never doubted that after a few years he would advance beyond his common position in the team. He was popular, was able to remember jokes and retell them. True, he was not a good marksman, but he was eager in his political training, and meticulous in the care of his uniform and accoutrements. Six weeks ago, when they had been ordered to the suburb, he had at first enjoyed the adventure, to be posted in a terrain he was familiar with. After all, he himself was a child of the outskirts of the city, which were dotted with forests, crossed by canals and train-tracks that went nowhere, with working class housing, mended fences, and rabbit hutches. During that time of duty he had encountered a woman who poked around in the dirt next to the ploughed up strip. She had not obeyed his request to move on. He had called the second guard, and together they had pulled up the woman. When they did so, glass fragments of preserving-jars had slid from her apron. Another time he had met an old man with two empty buckets in the forbidden border area, who had run away from him as fast as he could. Once, when he had returned a child back to its mother after it had run to the second barbed-wire fence, and she had not said as much as a

thank-you, he swore inadvertently. These aloof, deaf people! Behaving with the troop like civilians in enemy country! The young woman had pointed to the ploughed strip of earth: "We used to live there. They did not even allow us to harvest our apples!" For the first time since he had borrowed that uniform shirt on his tenth birthday, Sigurd had not been able to come up with an answer.

In class, they talked about similar encounters with the public, and about rumours of youths gathering in the inner city. But the civilian who was in charge of the lessons had brushed such incidents aside. The mood of the people was irrelevant. Sigurd had looked from one to the other. Their faces were inscrutable. And yet the others, too, must have understood that this one sentence turned them into accomplices. The thought of his father came to him, and he would have liked to write him about it. But of course the mail was censored. After their lesson, they all had stood to attention as always and had done their duty as always. Duty in the border district in the allotment gardens and little summerhouses, duty behind the ploughed up strip of land, where in earlier days apple trees had stood.

And yet since then something no longer seemed right. The instructor had been transferred, rumours of escape by comrades surfaced, although the sources of these rumours were not known. One night while on watch duty,

Kurt has asked: "What do you think of that? New moon and fir tree!" He had understood: an attempt to escape between the circumference of the spotlights of that section, approximately at the height of the fir tree. But the next day Kurt and two others had been commandeered to build entrenchments elsewhere. Who had reported them?

Sigurd had said yes during that night patrol without thinking about it. The moon was still bright. He had time to think about it. He loved the adventure and was not a spoilsport, but was that why he agreed? He was not exactly sure. He waited. Nothing happened to him. Had someone been appointed as bait, as a spy, and had betrayed Kurt and the others? Was there nobody you could trust anymore?

The groups on watch changed at irregular intervals. Clouds had subdued the clear autumn wind. Sigurd had it figured out. Today or tomorrow, there had to be a new moon. Today or tomorrow.

And now they have given the signal. We are ready! That's what it means. And you? And the other one?

He never had to ask, as long as he did not know what mistrust and lies were. He never had to ask: Who is the other one? Who? To the beat of their synchronized step, the questions pound in his head. The hastily cleared soil beneath their steps yields no answer.

The deer! If only he had not remembered them! Like under a spell, ears straight up. If only he had not thought of them! He wipes his hand over his eyes. To be like under a spell! To be mesmerized by something! Completely extinguished or completely alert, blind or far-sighted. That was something that should hurl you up into the air, make you rise above the state of waiting and being indifferent, and maybe drop you down afterwards.

Sigurd's face becomes blurred under the helmet.

He tries to think of the deer in the black thicket. They got away! But what if the fox tears them to pieces? If the snares of the poachers contract? He breathes more quickly, as if he had discovered the secret that supersedes the monotony of the days and years: to be mesmerized by something and maybe destroyed, - but for once, for one second, to be without any expectation, to be completely there! The secret he had always searched for, as when during berry-picking outings, he had kept himself apart, to the amusement of his sisters, in order to be able to think better, to find out about the secret that might have explained his father's singing as he met his end. They had arrested him, because the people had come from far away, at night, in disguise, in order to sing and pray with him in the empty sheepfold. Father had not returned. Shot dead, they said, and that he had sung to the very end. That is what he had wanted to think about while berry-picking,

and also about the few nights that he had been with his father in the sheepfold. All that remained in his memory were the outlines of distorted mouths, huge foreheads and sunken eye sockets. But he had allowed himself to be diverted by the brown, purple, and yellow pools of light in the coniferous forest, while the life and death of his father had remained obscure to him. He began to despise his mother and sisters, who bragged about it and were revered by the secret congregation because of it. In the beginning he had defended himself with acts like smashing windows, leaving dead rats on doorsteps, and refusing to harvest the fruits of the forest for the brothers and sisters of the community.

Later he had marched through the village as standard-bearer of the Young Pioneers, and had enjoyed the fear palpable behind the windows and the curtains. After all, the sect was prohibited, and he could have denounced people many a time. He had enjoyed being feared, and he had enjoyed being adored by the boys with whom he rambled through the forests, and to whom he told stories and legends that the others had long forgotten.

He had enjoyed it, nothing more. He had observed himself at these activities as you might watch a stranger. Once, at a sports competition, he met a boy who had the same air of aloofness as himself. They were partners in wrestling, did not defeat each other, and won on points at shooting and in

the triathlon. When at the awards ceremony they stood side by side and stared at each other, it suddenly became frighteningly clear to him that he did not know himself any better than he knew the other one. Movements, in shot-putting, the coiling back followed by the purposeful push, in running, the arms bent at an angle, the head leaning back, and in jumping, the forward-crouching of the body, all these were learnable movements, puppet movements. On the ride back, in the pale-green light of the railroad compartment, he had looked at the boys from his village, one by one. They sang together, marched together, then read pamphlets and discussed them, they bent down in rows harvesting potatoes, they swung in rows making hay, they lived as they were supposed to, they knew each other by name, but they moved like puppets on a string. After the sports competition he had become sick with pneumonia. In his dreams the movements of countless arms and legs had accelerated to very fast whirls, and when the fever had subsided, the doctor at the hospital had said: you all demand too much of your bodies. That sentence had stuck in his mind. Since he was still listed as sick and had time to roam through the forest, he had picked berries and mushrooms again, and had brought them to his mother for the community. But her profuse thanks and the secret boasting about his conversion were more unbearable to him than being despised.

He registered for the People's Police, because it was advertised on posters in his village. Putting too many demands on one's body was still calculable, pleasurable, believable. His eagerness had been noticed very quickly. He had been recommended for an officer's course, but had it put on hold because on a Sunday evening off duty he had met Margot, and they had already talked of marriage when they returned to her own village after the dance. She was not particularly pretty, she had red hands from her work in the paper factory. But she sat on the pillion like all girls, and he drove her home like all boys drove their girls home, at rapid speed, self-assertively leaning against the handlebars. This was how it had been that night as well, when the animals got themselves caught in the spotlight.

If only he had not remembered them! Mesmerized, ears erect.

The rifle bumps against his thigh, the strap chafes, right left right left, puppet movements, watching the frontier to guarantee peace, building dugouts. There is no salt to be had, Margot wrote, if you can get some – ramming in anti-tank barriers, setting concrete posts -, there are no needles, Margot wrote, and if you see any fruit ..., the second part of the sentence was stamped over, censored. Fruit is what the women have in their string bags, over there, at the other side of the border, behind the ploughed-up strip of land, right left right left, the rifle knocks against him, the strap chafes,

Sigurd is next to him today, another time Frank, another time Peter, unimportant names, uniforms, helmets, men's talk before falling asleep, boasting. Someday he will marry Margot, will remember what men talk about, someday he will be a father, that will cost him a few rounds of beer. Salt, we do not have any salt, Margot writes - if he could only break through the rhythm, just once! His father had sung, so they say, as he was being blindfolded. But that was many years ago and maybe it is only a story; the farmer who had told it to him, is long gone to the West, so he would not have to return to Bautzen³⁵ again. Because how can anyone sing blindfolded, someone who did not achieve anything, not a house of his own, no name, just a little scrap of leased land for cabbage and flowers, nothing; how can he sing, at death's door, three shots, and then probably thrown onto a cart - how can he sing? Blindfolded. Mesmerized?

Again he hears the tree shudder.

Sigurd pulls the wire-cutters from his pants, breaking the even rhythm of their steps. But why still stay in step? He plays with the wire-cutters. If they turn now, he will let the rifle slide from his shoulder and pull up the wire-cutters. Do you understand? Silent dialogue with the other: Do you understand? The wire-cutters in his hand mean escape! And he will pretend

³⁵ 'Bautzen' was a feared maximum security jail for political prisoners, in a town of the same name.

that he has to throw up, so that the other one will turn away. There are still ten steps, still eight. Those from the neighbouring section let the spotlight glide. Houses, trees. The images change like on a revolving stage. He senses the three or four who want to risk it along with him, he does not even know exactly who they are. Why not wait until tomorrow? Or wait until they are transferred to another section? Or wait until the other one has understood the silent language? If he shoots it is all over. A hit in the back, followed by alarm, screams: the end.

And if he does not shoot?

They turn.

Now!

Sigurd notices that he moans far too loudly as he bends forward.

Something is moving. Animals?

He takes a step backwards. Maybe it is best to hold Sigurd's forehead, to listen to nothing but the misery of his comrade.

But he staggers, his knees give way, the rifle slides from his shoulders. He stumbles into emptiness. Now he understands. The clicking of wire-cutters. Keyword: escape of a comrade. What are you going to do in that case, boys?

He takes up the rifle, and aims without excitement. The spotlight

from the neighbouring section wanders around. They have already noticed something. Sound the alarm, so they cannot blame you. You want to marry, father children, and have an apartment. Ridiculous to think about an apartment at this moment, and a warm room!

The spotlight from his own section creeps across the ground, taking hold of his boots, of his back. He stands, his finger on the trigger. The spotlight takes hold of three, four backs, belts, helmets. Go ahead and shoot! That's what you wanted! To shoot, destroy the white wall.

The loose ends of the wires are still vibrating, having let go of the human backs. The ground resonates with noise. Boots, voices. Alarm.

He still stands as before, his hand on the trigger.

Sigurd, over there, turns toward him. The three others turn as well and salute him. He lets the rifle sink.

And there they are already behind him, pulling at his limbs, jerking him around, the spotlight punches him in the eye, someone sticks his own rifle in his back. Feet start moving. Puppet movements. The voices around him sound sleepy, he can smell their exhalations. They ask him why he did not shoot. He does not know. He remains silent. He remembers the deer and how they escaped into the darkness. But whom should he tell this?

He could sing now, like his father is supposed to have sung. They

push him along.

Over there, on the other side of the border, windows and garden doors open. They emerge from their gazebos and family bungalows, still marked by sleep, shivering, and startled by the commotion of the spotlights and voices. They come and see him within shouting distance, unable to help. Within shouting distance they protest, demand, shrill, and in many voices. They only fall silent when a contingent approaches to repair the destroyed barbed-wire fence.

One of the crowd gives Sigurd a cigarette and light.

“What will happen to the boy?”

The little yellow flame dances playfully in front of Sigurd’s. The stranger’s hand which protects it is worn and chapped. The stranger’s hand means well. Sigurd inhales the smoke, deeply, to the top of his lungs, then throws the cigarette away and steps on it.

“I understand”, says the man of the crowd. “ I understand, that is a heavy burden. A human being. Someone, who let you go so that you guys could make it.” He put his hands in his pockets, chapped, good hands, hands which support those they reach out to.

Across the way the troop rolls up the left-over wire. One of them tests the firmness of the tangle between the concrete pillars. Then they move off,

all except for two men who use spades to dig up the compacted soil of the lethal strip at the spot where the penetration had taken place, and also join the tracks together again. The spotlights have now come to a stop.

The one with his hands in his pockets nods towards Sigurd and the other three as they follow the policeman, who carries their weapons, to the police station, where their particulars will be registered. The watchdog dances around them as they walk, but nobody has the strength to pat its fur.

4.2.2 Commentary

This story, *The One by my Side*, is about East German border guards who patrol the no-man's-land on their side of the Iron Curtain. They work in pairs, but it is mostly from the point of view of one border guard that the events of the story are told.

As in other works by Ingeborg Drewitz, the main character in this story is not given a name. In keeping with other instances of the author's technique of omitting personal names, this guard could represent many others at this particular time in history, faced with similar challenges and decisions.

Through his inner thoughts and recollections, Drewitz enables the reader to see life through the eyes of an East German. His job is very monotonous and boring, leaving many hours of loneliness, patrolling the border. As in *The Woman with the Black Headscarf*, many details of the story are presented to the reader through flashbacks into the past, as the guard reminisces about specific events of his childhood and youth and his hopes and aspirations for the future. We also learn about his own personal feelings of frustration about the present situation, for instance, how he hates the sight of the walls of white light made by the searchlights at the border,

which literally and metaphorically blind him and his colleagues from seeing the truth of their situation. He would like to shoot and destroy these searchlights because of what they represent, namely, the division of a nation, and the separation of a people. Yet he goes on doing his duty, because he feels he cannot risk his future: he simply wants a fulfilling career, comfortable living quarters, and possibly to start a family with his girlfriend, Margot.

The author's choice of a title for her story, *Der Nebenmann*, is interesting in that it encompasses several meanings. 'Der Nebenmann' can be translated as 'the one next to you', 'the person by your side', 'a neighbour', or in its most abstract sense, as 'the brother or human being we should be responsible for.' In the context of this particular story we can assume that Drewitz is referring to 'Der Nebenmann' not only literally as the protagonist's partner on duty, i.e. Sigurd, but as the individual who will force the main character to make a moral decision that will affect his own life, to become his brother's keeper.

It is mentioned at several times in the story that the guards on duty often know very little about each other. Sometimes their names are all that is made known to the other guard. Even though many hours are spent together patrolling the border, personal information and general conversation

are not encouraged, and not always a given. The protagonist is therefore left to wonder who this person next to him really is, where he comes from, what he thinks, and what his hopes and dreams may be. The question of trust presents itself in such situations as well, as each border guard wonders about the person standing by his side, whether he could perhaps confide in him, or if he is there as a spy. During practice sessions, the young men may joke around, but the question of whether any of them really know their co-workers remains unanswered. This border guard is not quite sure about his partner Sigurd. The only thing he knows, besides his name, is that he is quiet, mysterious, and, with his pipe-smoker's breath, smells just like any other guard on duty. They do not partake in any form of conversation, but simply patrol the border between East and West and put their time in like everyone else. The guard also wonders why his former partner, Kurt, had suddenly been transferred to another section. Perhaps this measure was related to the fact that earlier Kurt had mentioned how people try to escape when a new moon provides some cover of darkness between the fields of the spotlights. This makes him unsure, now more than ever, if there was anyone around him who could be trusted, and he is very aware that any decision he may want to make is his own responsibility.

However, the title of the story can also have a wider meaning. It may also represent the citizens of East Germany as a whole, how well they really knew their neighbours in the community, and if they could confide in them. Drewitz alludes to the fact that the government established and encouraged spies amongst the general population, and operated a censorship system to control all interaction. People in the East had to be on guard with respect to their conversations with others. There was a constant fear that someone, maybe even a relative or friend, could be capable of reporting back to police. Since the division of Germany into two separate states, the concept of 'the neighbour' could also be used in the context of East and West Germany now being neighbours of one another in the political sense. Despite the fact that they co-exist next to each other, and as the story shows, partly in plain view of each other, the differences in their circumstances and their ignorance about each other are quite apparent in the author's references to life at the border.

According to legend, Sigurd's name means 'happy hero' and someone who is deaf to danger. The central character contemplates the inappropriateness of this name for his partner. Certainly it does not appear that he is happy at all, with his stern, expressionless face. As it turns out, the impression is correct. If Sigurd were truly happy with the system of his

society, he would probably have been inclined to remain in the East. Obviously he is not content with the present situation, so he chooses to escape. Once he crosses the border and makes it to the West, one can believe that he will now live up to the meaning of his name, is happy to be in the West, and is in a sense a 'hero' for having dared to seize an opportunity which might have cost him his life, surviving the escape, and arriving unharmed at the other side of the Iron Curtain. Also he is indeed deaf to danger, because being a border guard, he knows all too well how risky it is to try and escape across the fortified West border, and yet he braves that danger.

The guards know from their experience of working at the border and in close proximity to the Western Sector how life appears better for those living in the West. The central character notices the women carrying bags of fruit and vegetables home to their families, knowing all too well how such products were much more difficult to acquire in the East. The written requests by his fiancée to try and get some scarce items for her, presumably because due to his position he had better access to such goods than ordinary people, underline this situation. While observing the daily activities of the West Germans, he thinks to himself how much more content they seem in comparison to the situation of his fellowmen in the East.

Throughout the story, references are made suggesting that the soldiers are similar to marionettes, that they are merely puppets of the government, made to execute its wishes. The border guards march in step, side by side, without speaking, with their movements repetitive and predictable. They appear to have no individuality, and are told by their superiors how to move, act, think and feel. The guards seem to be faceless people who wear the same uniform, carry the same weapons and pass their time walking back and forth.

Such conditioning is introduced at a much earlier stage. The border guard remembers a sports competition he participated in as a boy. He makes note of the fact that throughout the activities, such as racing, the boys all looked the same, and ran in the same way side by side, with their heads leaning back and their elbows bent. It seems that already at that time they possessed these marionette-like characteristics.

Through the reflections of the border guard, Drewitz extends the comparison of the similarity to marionettes or puppets to the general population under the regime as well. East Germans were restricted in many aspects of their lives, and under a great deal of control by the government, who 'pulled their strings', manipulating them like marionettes through the use of fear. Just about every aspect of their daily lives was decided for them

by the regime, with very limited choices with regard to the availability of goods, job preference, and personal freedom. They were told what to think and how to act and would face dire consequences if they refused or stepped out of line in any way.

Another significant element of the story is the author's comparison between humans and animals. The guard's thoughts repeatedly go back to the deer that had once suddenly appeared in the headlights of his motorcycle. They are seen as innocent creatures, dependent on the mercy of those behind the light to either destroy them or let them go. The border guards escaping to the West, also quite literally caught in a bright light, are suddenly faced with the same dilemma of whether they will live or die by those shining the light upon them. The deer as well as the escaping comrades and civilians, simply wish for the same thing, namely freedom. Neither wants to be held captive, but rather to be allowed to live life as they wish, according to their particular nature. Drawing on this simple parallel, Drewitz indirectly shows that in her view the people in the East were held captive, unable to come and go as they pleased. The border guards were there to make sure that their lives were contained in the East, with all the restrictions of the regime placed upon them. Sigurd and the other guards escaped to the West leaving a gaping hole in the barbed-wire fence that they had cut with their wire-

cutters. It is significant in the context of the whole story, however, that almost immediately following this reinforcement, troops were called who quickly began to repair the hole, similar to how one would fix an animal cage, so no more could escape. The border guard's father, who apparently had been blindfolded, shot and perhaps thrown on a cart, can also be compared to how one would hunt an animal such as a deer, shoot it and bring it home on a cart. Such disregard and disrespect for life had obviously been shown by those who once murdered the central figure's father. One might also compare the 'deer caught in the headlights' situation with the main character's inability to join the escapees. He obviously is tempted, but years of training made him 'freeze', unable to act, although at least the better side of his nature triumphs, i.e. he cannot shoot his partner.

The East Germans were made aware of the fact that life would be much easier for them living under the power of a Communist government if they co-operated within the system and tried not to go against its beliefs. The border guard's relatives, for example, already conditioned to work under totalitarian governments by holding minor jobs during the reign of the Nazis, appeared to be working obediently within the system, although in subtle ways were putting up their own form of resistance. Drewitz demonstrates to her readers how people may appear to conform, but might

indirectly show their disapproval. We learn, for instance, that the border guard's family were members of some form of religious sect, which was at times used by members to help each other, and to discuss various issues concerning their lives of living in the Eastern Sector. His father was evidently murdered because of his active involvement in such a group, since these organizations did not have the approval of the government and could be seen as enemies of the State. Another, smaller act of resistance concerns the refusal of the guard's mother to buy him a shirt for the Young Pioneers. His parents did not approve of his decision to join such an organization connected with the government. This resistance was short-lived, however, since their son borrowed a shirt from a neighbour. While parading through the town as a Young Pioneer, he enjoyed feeling important and feared. The way the people would glare at him, on the other hand, indicated the disapproval of such groups. Not showing public interest in the presence of this youth organization was a subtle way, of demonstrating resistance to such government-run groups and what they represented.

The border guard, an employee of the government, shows his own form of resistance in a more drastic form, when faced with the difficult decision concerning the escape of his partner. He was trained and ordered to shoot anyone attempting to escape to the West. Yet during the moment he is

supposed to shoot Sigurd and the three other escapees, his conscience outweighs his sense of duty. Unfortunately Sigurd's plans were unknown to him due to the customary distrust. He learns too late that the rustling of tree branches and the flicking of wire-cutters mean an escape attempt is imminent. When he grasps what is happening, his life flashes before his eyes. Thoughts of career, future, and Margot fill his mind as he pauses with his finger on the trigger. This inner conflict perhaps mirrors the conflict between the two Germanies: people in the East not knowing what to do, whether to remain or to flee to the West, and those in the West not knowing how to react when the partition once again demands a victim before their very eyes. Sigurd has made his choice and escapes into the darkness of night, just as the deer had done. The author shows us that by his decision not to shoot, the main character (otherwise the 'he' refers to Sigurd) is in fact resisting the government's belief in killing those trying to escape. This is his way of demonstrating that life is sacred; he does not believe in killing animals or human beings, simply because they want to be free. This life-altering decision is a direct parallel to the situation he and Margot once faced when they nearly hit a deer with his motorcycle. Instead of running over it, he let it go. Drewitz then draws our attention to the fact that while these

guards may appear cold and heartless, they do have a conscience, hopes and fears, like everyone else.

The story makes it obvious that some West Germans perceived the border and the situation in the Eastern Sector as too painful to acknowledge. The border guard notices how Westerners ignore them and avoid looking in their direction. Even the bus conductors sit with their backs turned to the East, almost as if they were in denial of its existence. Only the reaction of the young children, pointing at the guards, obviously curious, and asking their parents questions, is genuine and innocent. They are still too young to comprehend the significance and reason for the erection of the Wall, and have not yet been conditioned to imitate the behaviour of adults.

Repeatedly, the author draws our attention to the censorship enforced by the Communist regime, a topic of great concern to her. When the border guard receives mail from Margot, several phrases have been blackened out, making them impossible to read. The government wanted to control all aspects of people's lives, including written material and mail. Anything considered inappropriate was not permitted to be distributed.

By exploring the interrelationship, or lack thereof, between two East German border guards, Drewitz manages to explore a range of issues of

society and behaviour in East Germany, of the relationship between East and West, and also that of constant human values.

4.3.1 The Imprisoned City

The dusk remained behind us. The night, with forests and cultivated plains only rarely interspersed by cities, and the growing darkness ahead, hardly reach us in the cabin. The plane is cruising quietly. We read or doze. Passengers: they land in New York, land in Calcutta, land in Berlin; poverty and honeymoon bliss, borders and centers of power, languages and hopes, they all remain behind us on the ground. The narrow beams of light from the reading lamps define the nights, as the blinding brightness above the fields of clouds define the days, and the smile of the stewardess, who provides us with newspapers, food and drink, defines our sense of community.

Diagonally across from me, on the armrest of the seat, lies the hand of a stranger. The tall backrest of the airplane chair hides its owner. The stewardess has collected the trays, since we will soon begin the descent for landing. That is when I noticed the hand, the stranger's hand: its lean, friendly appearance, and the strength of its grasp. A man's hand. Millions of such hands tighten screws, swing hammers, use drills and torch cutters, control tweezers and fountain pens, dancing violin bows, and the game of the compass, trigger and ploughshare, steering-wheel and rudders, as well as

the lives of many people. We have learned to rely on the work of such hands, anonymous hands. We have almost forgotten that they can also cup a woman's shoulder or a young boy's head, clasp a friend's hand, or cover a person's face in order to hide it. I look at the hand, the stranger's hand, and see how alarmingly it resembles another, a hand whose gestures had accompanied its owner's words, purposefully, in a matter-of-fact way, and how later it had grasped my arm: Joachim's hand. And suddenly, from the dull blackness of the night below, I hear the slamming of doors, whispers, the sound of boots marching, and slogans emitted by loud speakers and television sets. Joachim's hand, raised in a calming gesture as it had once done in the camp near the Arctic Ocean, when our hands were swollen, his as well, though muscle-hard from building the railroad bed; and in the freight car, on the long trip which ended the imprisonment, it had gestured like that, in order to calm impatience and feverish joy. I have often clasped Joachim's hand after that good-bye at the suburban train station. We would meet every year, whenever I was in Berlin on business. We had meals together in the West, and then we went for walks, sometimes in the East, sometimes in the West.

This year it will be different. I do not intend to drive to Bernauer Street, to Potsdam Square, or to some such place near the Wall, which has

now become both tourist destination and the end of all hopes. I know that Joachim stayed on the other side. I would not be able to stand it if the guide on some tour bus would list the adventures and miseries of those trying to escape, and of those who had not made it. I know that Joachim remained over there. It is on his account that I booked the flight to Berlin, in order to visit him, while it is still possible.

The plane is banking into its landing approach. Outside, the night begins to show decorative chains of lights, some dull and miserable, others like glistening jewels, up to the horizon two worlds - separated even in the darkness: Berlin.

Joachim lives in Treptow, the part of the city that had once been famous for its observatory, but in recent years was visited because of the bombastic war cemetery honouring the Russian soldiers killed in action in the Second World War. Every year we met, whenever I had business to attend to in Berlin. I was used to keeping one evening free for him. Mostly we ate at the Kurfürstendamm. In the fall of '53 I asked him whether he did not want to give up and to start anew in the West. He was not even forty, and he had a wife and children. He worked as a chemist in the food industry, and it would not have been difficult for him to find a position in the West. His children could have been spared the confrontation with the youth

organization. After all, the oldest had only just started school. Instead of giving an answer, he asked me to come to Treptow the next day. It was a Sunday. I sent a telegram to my wife telling her that I would arrive later than expected. Since I hardly knew Treptow, I was amazed by the somber elegance of the house in which he lived, which equaled that of the houses in Mommsen or Bleibtreu-Street. Hallmarks of distinction, of bourgeois self-confidence. Joachim led me into a room that seemed to extend into tops of the old trees of Treptow Park. Ten or twelve young people sat or stood around, with attentive faces, sizing up the newcomer with polite coolness, but showing a casual and hearty warmth when Joachim's wife let their two children make the rounds to say good-night. The little ones must have been used to that, they tolerated the tousling, gentle tugging and patting without flinching, and then slipped out of the room under the out-stretched arms of their mother, like young birds. For half a minute there was silence. The darkness in the treetops grew and seeped through the window. It seemed to make breathing difficult, until someone struck a match. All at once everyone began to talk. Names I did not know were mentioned, linked to events I could not appreciate. A street lantern's reflection now turned the darkness into a kind of scenery on the ceiling, the restless shadows of the foliage fleeing and gliding as if in transit to somewhere, letting individual

faces emerge from their anonymity, something one might observe with fellow-passengers on a ship. A candle had been lit for those who smoked. I saw Joachim's hand lift in calming gestures, giving emphasis to certain ciphers with half dancing, half circling movements. I remember a case study M24, and a case study P13. Then I watched him move the violin bow, because later they played music together. Joachim's wife brought the stands for the music sheets. The group must have been quite successful. To be sure, Joachim never spoke of it afterwards, during our meetings later on. However, now and again refugees who had been incarcerated for political reasons, visited me, and told me of a well-thought-out support system for their families during the time of their imprisonment, and for themselves after their release. A few mentioned Joachim's name in this context. He had made sure that they received good jobs in spite of being politically out of favour. His circle of friends was supposedly large and fairly influential. He would be disappointed that they had given into their fear after all, and had chosen to escape.

Once every year I had dinner with him. We never spoke of these matters. We spoke of Bach's orchestration and of the difficult freedom of Händel's composition scores, which were not thoroughly worked out. The western half of the city changed more from one visit to the next, and before

long began to resemble the other cities newly erected on ruins. I did not always have time for a visit in the East. But the Strausberger Square, which for a long time was the end point of Stalin Avenue, invariably brought back the memory of Minsk or Orel at the time of the military advance of 1941: the architecture a hodge-podge of poverty and boastfulness, arrogance and grief, as one might find on the Russian plains, now transported many hundreds of kilometers to the West, and newly erected on the field of ruins in the old working-class quarters around the Alexanderplatz.

I no longer asked Joachim what he thought about a move to the West. I knew what he concealed. His children now both went to school, the boy was a member of the 'Pioneer' youth group, whilst the girl refused to wear the uniform. I also saw Joachim's wife, we met in the Pergamon Museum and there stood side by side in front of the famous altar, which had remained pure under the dust and tears of the centuries.

Joachim's wife wore a simple suit and held herself up very straight. Now they say that at that time her long unrecognized illness had already begun to develop: Schizophrenia and Persecution Mania. The boy wrote to me that she was in the mental hospital. He said that he was now fifteen years old, and just in the first year of his apprenticeship. He also wrote that he wanted to go into shipbuilding, and that his sister was doing well. Not a

word in the letter about his father, Joachim. Just then the plane touches the runway. The motors stop, and we are being shaken as we are rolling towards the airport buildings and come to a halt. The passengers leave their seats without good-byes. The one whose hand fascinated me leaves the cabin before me. Only the smiling good-bye of the stewardess reminds us of the fact that we had shared a journey. How often have I arrived this way! Sometimes, on a return flight, there were refugees amongst the passengers. They talked, talked from the heart about the hardships they had endured. We, the others, listened, but nothing more. We gave their children an orange, or a piece of chocolate, and after the plane landed we quietly got up from our seats. Nothing more. Joachim must surely have known what divides the two worlds. The last time we saw each other was shortly before the city was torn apart by force. A rainy summer evening, the cars spraying veils of water, the evening news announcing the number of refugees for the last twenty-four hours, whilst food was being served, and people ate and drank. Only one waiter had stopped, serving tray in hand, in order to hear more clearly.

“Poor fellow, he has not yet learned how to smile!”

“What’s wrong with you, Joachim?” I had never known him to be a cynic. He did not look well, he had not yet taken a vacation, and he could

not keep his fingers still, something I had never noticed about him before. He drank up, refilled his glass, and gulped down the wine. Then he gripped his napkin: "Listen" he spoke very quietly, his face became blotchy, and his hands had let go of the cloth. For ten years he had done what I had suspected all along: had rendered help in emergencies, created by the dictatorship; ten long years he had born the uncertainty of the knock on the door, ten years he had interpreted the wordless language of those who were persecuted, a detective in the name of human empathy. He was now forty-seven years old. These ten years are the best of your life, so they say. And now two of his helpers had been arrested.

I believe I did something ridiculous, I looked at my reflection in the knife, or turned the glass, or twisted the tablecloth, I could not say anything. I was scared that my voice would sound too brittle, too indifferent, or like muffled cursing. Finally, Joachim put his hand on my arm. "You will not understand me-", his hand now lay totally still, "I am going back." Outside the cars sprayed veils of water, the waiters cleared the tables quietly and efficiently, the smoke of good cigars wafted through the room. I remained silent. It was probably because of the wine that Joachim's face reminded me of pictures of Christ, such as carvers and painters of the past had left behind, in the symbolic language they shared in their own time. I should have

interjected: Don't stay! You know that one day the doorbell will ring and you will have no escape! Don't stay! One man's hand provides little protection from many hands that act as tools! I neglected to say that. Or rather, I would have been ashamed to say it at this moment, in these hours. He showed me pictures of his wife and his daughter. The wife was not in very good health, "but we are a good pair!" he joked, and again I realized what he was hiding. Thousands were still giving up. Thousands still hurried across the border, driven by the fear of the doorbell ringing, weary from sleepless nights and as if in a fever, they subjected themselves to the checkpoint controls, jammed themselves into the suburban trains, the subways, westward. The cities of the Russian plains had risen near the Alexanderplatz, westward, westward, the utopia of the Russian plains nesting in stairwells and in the homes of neighbours, uniforms with faces, empty eyes, staring straight ahead. Joachim showed me such a picture of his son, half profile, jutting chin. "He is fourteen" he said, nothing more.

I accompanied Joachim to Bahnhof Zoo. The trains were still commuting between the districts of Potsdam and Erkner, between Spandau and Grünau. I shoved a couple of cigars into his coat pocket, also chocolates for his wife and chocolate bars for the children, for the boy as well.

Tomorrow I will buy chocolates again, and oranges, perhaps coffee and rice, too, I have no idea how the controls are at the crossing for West Germans, one hears all kinds of stories. I ask the taxi driver, as he locks my luggage into the trunk.

“Why don’t you take something along for my sister, if you plan on going to Treptow. She has a baby now.” But then he dismisses his remark with a gesture. “No offence, sir, it just occurs to me, hearing such questions on a daily basis, how things go at the border, how long it takes; yes, the likes of us would stand in line for a couple of nights, just to sit at a table with people over there.” He starts the motor, the taxi meter is ticking, we drive along the streets that I have so often driven before. The facades of windows do not give anything away, the traffic lights play their indifferent game, the young hold hands, the old stand patiently by their dogs, in the window displays the colours in fashion boast: Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter, always well dressed! Always successful! The streets, which I have so often driven through, glide past, the taxi meter is ticking, and the chauffeur chews on his pipe. I could ask him about his sister and the baby, whether it is a boy or a girl, but I feel nauseated by the helpless politeness. I look at his broad back, the glowing tobacco in his pipe, and his face in the rear view mirror, illuminated by the changing lights. The porter at the hotel has a letter for

me, a handwriting I do not recognize, mailed in Treptow. I want to read it in my room, I want to rip it open when nobody is watching. The elevator glides upwards, the bellboy stands to attention, his face twitching with suppressed yawning. He takes the suitcase with a familiar agility, unlocks the door, checks light switches and wardrobe locks, “everything is in order,” he wishes me a pleasant stay and takes the tip like bellboys anywhere. I have to rub my eyes, when I am alone, because except for the letter nothing here reminds me of the border, or the Wall that keeps Joachim away, or of the reality of the city. Well-kept furniture, bright carpets, tiled bathroom, the telephone.

A sheet ripped out of an exercise book flutters out of the envelope. A child’s handwriting, with angular loops and slanting letters meant to simulate a mature handwriting:

Dear Sir,

You have informed us that you want to visit us. My father asked me to tell you that we are all fine, even mother. We cannot receive visitors because our living room is rented out. Otherwise we could not keep the apartment, as long as father..., then comes a sentence which is deleted with thick ink, and over the “as long as” is written “ because” – because father

does not earn a lot. My brother is in Rostock at the moment, normally it is he who looks after the mail,

Best regards,

Beate

I turn the paper over, I read it backwards, diagonally, looking for some sign, some information. But the paper contains only five sentences. What does that mean?

You will not understand me-, Joachim's hand tight around my arm, calmly -, I am going back again.

What has happened to him, what? His wife ill, confused, ruined. And what about him?

Yet this letter says: Do not visit us, we have a tenant, the walls have ears. In my mind, I see the room which opens into the treetops, I see the many young faces, I see the wife who leads the children around to say their good night, and the strangers who come to my office to bring me greetings, and to tell me what someone has done for them, someone whose name they do not mention. Still careful, still scared.

You will not understand me -

Only now do I notice that I have crumpled the paper from the exercise book, and that I am still wearing my coat. Behind the curtains one can hear the muffled sounds of the restless traffic. I stagger to the window, I rip open the curtains, and press my face against the window pane, the cold glass. In the pale light, the rhythm of the street, red-yellow-green-yellow-red. At a store front across the street, the paper-mache hero with his big biceps smiles down at the couples below, and at the shapeless old woman behind her dog. Do they not hear what the glistening lights of the night keep to themselves: My father asked me to write to you, that we are doing fine - do they not hear what a child's letter is concealing? The newspapers are still full of it, every single day. The pictures too, the silent walls, the hollow windows, the hiding places for the sharpshooters.

I smoothen out the paper again, trying to sense the child's hand, its smell of school, and of the happiness of riding a bicycle, but I feel nothing, nothing at all, and all of a sudden I know that this is the hand that puts food on the father's plate, and puts her finger against her lips when he rebels in anger: Hush father, our lodger reads the newspaper! We are lucky that we have him. You no longer earn a lot anymore -, and the twitching, bird-like hands of the mother will probably hold this child's hand for a few minutes. That you still come, Beate, that you still come to see me!

I do not remember Beate's face on the photograph. A girl who put up a fight against the uniform, that is all I know about her. Perhaps she was in the room when the doorbell rang and the father had been taken away; and perhaps she was in the room when the doorbell rang and he came back, and did not find the mother anymore, perhaps it was she who had to tell the father what happened, and the brother stood by, jutting chin, eyes staring into space, a fifteen year old boy, who had greeted his father with a nod of his head. But I do not even remember her face on the photograph. And I do not know what took place between father and son, only that it destroyed the mother, that I know. And that I am not allowed to visit them, that they live in fear, I know that too.

You will not understand me -

Yes, Joachim, yes I do!

I will go across the border and buy a picture postcard at Alexanderplatz, or in Weissensee, or in a pub in the dark brown, dilapidated Königsstrasse. Dear Joachim -

The cold glass brings me back to reality. I have nothing to say to him, absolutely nothing. Dear Joachim - the cities of the Russian plains have moved westward, and thousands have gone to the West, but you put your hand on my arm: trust me, you meant to say. Trust me!

On the street the bellboy bows to a lady before shutting the car door. On the street, the old game of the night continues: Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter, the young hand in hand, and the old ones with their dogs. The bellboy remains by the curb until the car turns the corner, then he straightens his cap and comes swaying back into the hotel lobby.

If only they have not reserved the usual place for me in the restaurant below, the one which was just perfect for Joachim and me! I want to sit in the middle of the big room. I want to look at all the faces, how they smile at one another or at the wine. I will look at all those faces that still know the old game of the night: Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter. I want to sit in the middle of the room, in the middle of all the coming and going.

4.3.2 Commentary

The title *The Imprisoned City* truly reflects the main theme of the story. After the division of Berlin into East and West, it became not only a unique city, but one in which the citizens living in both the Eastern and Western Sectors felt imprisoned by their situation. Once the border was closed, East Germans were trapped on their side of the border, forbidden access to the Western side, with their lives becoming more stringently controlled by the government. Denied freedom like a prisoner, closely watched by those in power, it was a city from which nobody was allowed to escape.

The story presented is seen through the eyes of a man from West Germany, whose friend Joachim still lives in East Berlin. Drewitz gradually provides the necessary background information on Joachim and his family through flashbacks into the past, from the narrator's perspective.

Already in the second paragraph of the story the reader's attention is drawn to a hand, resting on the arm of an airplane seat, which somehow reminds the narrator of Joachim's hand. Memories come flooding back to him, as he reminisces about the past he shared with his friend which evidently includes time in a Russian POW camp, their final journey home,

and continued friendship. Through detailed descriptions of this stranger's hand, the reader learns more about Joachim's physical and emotional strength. To his friend, it appears that there is nothing Joachim cannot do. This physical ability is matched by his psychological strength and determination, as he decides to remain in the East. At the same time, the narrator also comments on how the stranger's hand appears friendly and gentle, characteristics resembling Joachim's personality as well, in that he is a kind and good-natured person who also cares about his fellowmen. Later in the story, there is a moment when Joachim's fingers twitch and move uncontrollably, symbolizing that his control is weakening, not only physically but in his life as well. He has endured many years of hard work and the stress of secretly helping many of his fellow citizens, has not taken a vacation in years, and all of this is evidently finally beginning to take its toll on him. He begins to realize that despite all his efforts his world is now beginning to collapse around him.

The narrator finds it difficult to comprehend why Joachim chooses to stay in the East, when so many others have fled, and his professional background would surely allow for a new start in the West. At times he gets frustrated with Joachim, because he knows what sort of life he and his family have, and how much better the situation would be for them if they

were to move to the West. Drewitz uses Joachim's friend to show the reader, through Western eyes, the type of political and economic situation which existed in Berlin around the time the border between East and West was closed. Since he lives in the West and visits the East, he is able to see the differences which exist between the two cities. Even from an airplane, these differences are visible. The narrator notices the lights below him, with one side looking dull, even miserable, while the other side seems to glisten like jewels, symbolizing not only the obvious external difference between East and West but also the differences between the hopes and spirit of the people on both sides. The Western lights shine brightly, representing how life is moving in a positive direction for the people there, building new lives and restoring the city, whilst the citizens of East Berlin have a subdued, dulled outlook on their future.

After his visit to the Eastern part of the city one evening, Joachim's friend arrives back in his hotel room in West Berlin, and takes note of the fact that one would hardly believe that such a well-furnished, brightly coloured room could be so close to where Joachim is, on the other side of the border. It is difficult for him to understand how two sides of the same city could differ so greatly, while physically being so close to each other.

At the beginning of the story, it is obviously still comparatively easy to cross the border, as demonstrated by the two friends taking walks on both sides of the city. This indicates how Joachim would have had ample opportunity to remain on the Western side. We learn that Joachim is a chemist in the food industry, and according to his friend would have had little difficulty finding a job in the West. Nevertheless, knowing of the advantages he could have, he still wanted to remain in the East. Maybe he believes in the principles of socialism and believes that the negative aspects of life in the East are only temporary.

The issue of censorship surfaces once again, as in the two other stories under discussion. The narrator receives a letter from Joachim's daughter Beate, which has obviously been screened. Certain words and phrases are blackened out, making it impossible to see what she had written. As said before, such restrictions on reading material and personal mail did not exist in the Western Sector.

Another difference between the conditions in East and West is apparent in the availability and access to certain goods. In East Berlin, the government exercised control over the distribution of merchandise that often led to shortages. Whenever the narrator visits the family in Treptow, he therefore brings products such as chocolate for the children. In the same

context, when refugees board the planes to the West, passengers give them fruit such as oranges, which they were not accustomed to having in the East.

Even though Joachim remains in the East by choice, he does not always comply with the government enforced policies. Throughout the story, the reader is made aware that he holds secret meetings in his home, where issues pertaining to the regime are discussed. He has a large circle of friends, and the narrator later learns that he helps people escape to the West if they so choose, and assists those who were held as political prisoners. Although Drewitz does not state it directly, leaving the inference up to the reader, it is clear that she wants Joachim and his friends seen as a positive force and a bulwark of decency in the midst of a corrupt and poisonous environment. For example, in the section where Joachim and several of his friends are holding a meeting in his apartment, the scenery outside is such that it appears that the room somehow extends out into the beautiful large trees, whose shadows form images of scenery on the ceiling of the room, creating a pleasant atmosphere and establishing a connection with an unspoiled, natural world. Also, after their discussion, they play music together, which lightens the mood of the situation around them and strengthens their bond. Children, who are customarily seen as innately good and pure, obviously felt at ease with this group of people: We see Joachim's

son and daughter go about the room saying good-night to the visitors in a trusting and friendly manner.

As these children grow older, however, they have to make their own choices and may go in different directions. We read that Joachim's daughter, Beate, later shows her own form of resistance by not wanting to be part of a government-run youth organization and refusing to wear the uniform, whilst her brother becomes a member of the Young Pioneers.

Living under the confinement of the Communist regime, the East Germans were subjected to a great deal of emotional stress. Joachim's decision to remain in East Berlin had a profound affect on his family. The narrator points out that during his previous visits to Treptow, he noticed that Joachim's wife did not appear to be in good health. Later we learn that she eventually had to be committed to a mental institution. Although her illness may have been dormant, the constant worry about the safety of her family and living in fear undoubtedly contributed to the decline of her health and proved to be more than she could handle. There is an obvious and noteworthy similarity with Rudolf's mother in *The Woman with the Black Headscarf*, whose sanity also gave way under unbearable pressure. It is interesting that in these particular stories, it is only the female characters that suffer mental breakdowns; even though the men in these stories also

experience a great deal of stress, it appears that the women are more affected in this regard. Perhaps Drewitz is implying that, "... Die Frau anders [ist], anders [erlebt], anders [formuliert]." ³⁶ Maybe the author feels that women and men are capable of experiencing things differently, even under the same circumstances. On the whole, however, Drewitz does not make clear distinctions between male and female behaviour, but is concerned with the reactions of human beings in general. Since Joachim's wife became ill, their daughter, Beate, apparently had to take on more responsibility for the family, and had to grow up fast in her particular situation. When the narrator receives a letter from Beate telling him they were unable to receive visitors, he notices that even her handwriting already appears to be that of an adult.

Drawing on religious parallels, Drewitz underlines the significance of Joachim's sacrifice and fate even further. In one particular passage of the story, the narrator comments how Joachim's face reminds him of a picture of Christ, no doubt not only a reference to his physical features but to his selfless actions as well. We are also reminded that Joachim and Jesus were both in the prime of their lives when they dedicated themselves to helping those in need. While Jesus sacrificed his life for others, Joachim gives up

³⁶ Shafi 28.

the prospect of a better life for himself and his family by staying in the East and helping others go to the West, so they could make a new start under more promising conditions. After all, they stood up for what they believed in, regardless of the certainty that when apprehended, they would face harsh consequences. Both Jesus and Joachim had a large circle of friends; Jesus was betrayed by one of them, and likewise someone evidently reported Joachim's actions to the authorities. Interestingly enough, this comparison is made regardless of the fact that religion officially played no role in an atheist, Communist society. However, there is little doubt that Drewitz wants Joachim to be understood as a kind of Christ-figure.

The actual circumstances of Joachim's fate remain unknown to the reader, as we are left to speculate what finally became of him. The narrator's reaction shows us that he is very disturbed by Beate's letter, and knows that things must have gotten worse for her father. He is saddened by the fact that what he had foreseen has unfortunately turned to reality, namely that Joachim's situation would continue to become increasingly difficult and more dangerous the longer he remained in the East.

At the end of the story, the author leaves her reader with many unanswered questions concerning Joachim. But as we wonder about his fate and empathize with him and his family, we are no doubt meant to be made

aware of the fact that during this time in history, other East Germans faced similar circumstances, with their disappearance and whereabouts remaining a mystery.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The translations of the three short stories by Ingeborg Drewitz presented in this thesis all contain their own special contributions and relevant points with reference to the discussed topic. However, they share similarities, such as the location in the divided former capital, Berlin, and the time frame in which they all take place, namely, the period when Germany was divided into East and West.

While focusing on the common theme of how this division affected the lives of the people involved and living in the situation during this time, each story is told from a different point of view, providing a more in-depth look at various aspects of the circumstances faced by the population, thus creating a more rounded picture. In *The Woman with the Black Headscarf*, the reader is shown through the main character referred to in the title, and her son Rudolf, how the division of Germany altered people's lives from an East German's perspective. We are then taken to the very centre of this division in *The One by my Side* where the situation is presented from an East German border guard's point of view. Lastly, in *The Imprisoned City*, Joachim's western friend, the narrator of the story, allows us to view the current circumstances through the eyes of a West German.

Drewitz enables her readers to visualize the physical appearance of the divided city through detailed descriptions of the scenery, including the condition of structures, the continued presence of ruins, and the landscape around Berlin. We are made aware of the vast differences between the two parts of the city, and how the western side is beginning to resemble other Capitalist cities, as it continues to rebuild itself after the war, whereas in the East there is much less progress in the area of redevelopment.

Even though the three short stories are based on a similar theme, the author approaches them in different ways. *The Imprisoned City* and *The Woman with the Black Headscarf* contain more interaction and dialogue between the characters, and it is through these conversations that the reader gradually gains the necessary insight to better comprehend the meaning and importance of the stories. Also, these two specific works deal more with the separation of friends and loved ones caused by the presence of the border. *The One by my Side* differs from the other two stories in that much of the information provided to the reader is presented through the inner thoughts of the border guard, as we learn more about the situation he faces and the personal and moral dilemmas with which he has to struggle.

The main characters in each story, Rudolf in *The Woman with the Black Headscarf*, the East German border guard in *The One by my Side*, and

Joachim in *The Imprisoned City*, all have opportunities to flee to the West, but decide against this option. Rudolf's mother continually wonders why her son does not move to the Western Sector, considering the fact that he takes great pains in helping others escape. The border guard contemplates what life would be like if he cut through the barbed-wire fence and left for the West, an obviously dangerous but not impossible feat, considering his partner Sigurd later succeeds in doing just that. Joachim and his western friend spend many hours walking together on both sides of the city, demonstrating how at least until the final completion of the Wall and its fortification it would have been possible for him to simply remain in West Berlin. Yet they all remain, and the stories show that the reasons may be the desire to help others, maybe hope for better times to come, or simply missed opportunities.

Repeatedly, the subject of trust is brought to the reader's attention. It is shown how instrumental and necessary it was for East Germans living under Communist rule to know in whom they could confide, because the regime implemented an extensive network of spies in the East and forced ordinary citizens to keep close watch over their neighbours. This difficult and stressful situation made it impossible for the people to speak freely on issues of concern, for fear of being arrested.

In these particular stories, we can see how the element of trust affected the characters on different levels. The border guard comments that guards, although in training and on duty together, really do not know each other well. They are unable to determine those in whom they may share confidences, because they may be spies, stationed there to watch the others. Rudolf and his mother also have to be extra cautious with regard to their contacts in the West, and whom they could trust with confidential information. It is clear that Rudolf's arrest must have been triggered by an informant amongst their neighbours. Similarly, Joachim, who has many connections and a large circle of friends, must be on constant guard with whom he associates and in whom he confides, due to the uncertainty of not knowing who may report him to officials.

The author uses the technique of omitting personal names of some of the characters in her works, perhaps to show that these people could be representative of many others faced with similar circumstances during this period in German history.

The concept of secret meetings held in the Communist East, despite the presence of spies, is brought to attention here as well. Joachim hosts such gatherings in his home in Treptow, East Berlin. Similarly, Rudolf conducts meetings at his place, where the topics of discussion might include

finding safe routes for those wishing to leave, and talking about life under the control of the regime. Through the recollections of the East German border guard, it becomes evident that his father was arrested and in fact killed for partaking in such activities, which was forbidden by the government. These illegal get-togethers, held sometimes under the façade of religious worship, were the means by which people living under the restrictions of the East German government were able to meet with those in similar circumstances. Such meetings were a form of resistance to government policies and laws that prohibited this kind of activity. As well, involvement in such organizations served to undermine the teachings and beliefs of the regime.

Another common thread linking these stories involves the mental anguish and suffering inflicted upon those living in a Communist society. When we meet Rudolf's mother compulsively retracing the same daily route, it becomes clear that she has lost her mind, and the flashbacks to past events explain why: the affects of the war, and the events and losses that followed, left her with absolutely nothing. Joachim's wife meets a similar fate and ends up in a mental hospital. She could no longer bear the worry and fear that went along with Joachim's secret work, and the stress of living under the power of the regime. The East German border guard experiences a

different form of mental stress in that he struggles with an inner conflict of what he should do; stay in the East or flee to the West. He faces a moral dilemma of whether he should disobey his superiors and accept the consequences, or murder his fellow guard. Since his work physically puts him between East and West Berlin, he is able to observe what life may have to offer him on the other side. He constantly toys with the idea of escaping, but it does not materialize.

The impact the division of Germany had on children is also implied throughout these three stories. Beate in *The Imprisoned City* has to take on more responsibility since her father's evident arrest and her mother's stress-induced illness, robbing her of a normal childhood. The children whom Rudolf unsuccessfully tries to reunite with their parents in the West ultimately end up in a state orphanage in East Berlin where, as the story implies, they will be politically indoctrinated. Like most young Germans the border guards in *The One by my Side* had once been members of the Young Pioneers, a government-run youth organization whose aim it was to erase all signs of individuality, preparing them for careers later on in life of unquestioningly serving their country.

Drewitz repeatedly uses flashbacks, a technique that provides the reader with important background information necessary for a better

comprehension of the story and its context. The characters sometimes reflect upon past experiences, enabling us to understand their actions in the present, and how experiences helped shape the person they have become, their way of thinking, and the decisions they make.

Throughout the stories, we become aware of the fact that the availability of goods in the East is quite different from that of West Berlin, paralleling, of course, the reality of the situation after the war. When Joachim's friend visits Treptow in East Berlin, he always brings chocolate and other such items that he feels the family was not able to purchase. Likewise, Margot often wants her fiancé, the border guard, to try and buy her certain food items that are scarce in the East, and might be easier for him to obtain than for ordinary citizens.

Another example of the control the regime in the East inflicted on its citizens can be seen in Drewitz' references to the strict censorship laws enforced by the government. The author uses several examples in the three stories under discussion, to show the reader how closely the East Germans were watched, and the absence of their basic right to privacy. For example, when the border guard receives letters from his fiancé, some words and phrases have been blackened out, a sign that his mail is routinely opened and

censored. Beate, whose letter to the narrator in *The Imprisoned City* has been censored in the same way, shows how officials checked personal mail.

The facial expressions of the border guards and Joachim's son as a Young Pioneer have similar characteristics with their stern, emotionless expressions conveying that they took their duties seriously. Their eyes seem to stare into space, giving them a trance-like appearance. Of course, since the indoctrination evidently is not successful in every case, their unhappy expressions may perhaps also mask inner feelings of discontentment with their predicament and the longing of being in different circumstances.

All three stories seem to end without specific details given about the characters, leaving the reader to wonder about their fate. There are no happy endings, and the described circumstances and developments are rather bleak, perhaps the author's way of depicting the somber mood felt in reality by those who actually lived in similar circumstances. Drewitz' intent was no doubt to establish a link to certain historically verified incidents, in which East German citizens were arrested, killed, or disappeared without a trace.

Another stylistic ingredient the author incorporates into her stories concerns the deliberate use of elusive elements. The reader must pay close attention to seemingly insignificant details throughout the story, since much of what Drewitz wishes to convey to her readers is often found, upon close

examination, by what is merely implied, or even left out. One must sometimes read between the lines in order to fully understand the context, and the author's intent.

Even though Drewitz makes her audience aware of her political preference, the Democratic West, she never portrays one side of Berlin as perfect and without flaws, and the other as containing only negative qualities. On the contrary, she provides a more convincing and realistic picture of the situation by showing us rounded characters on both sides of the border, with positive and negative traits.

Ingeborg Drewitz dedicated her professional life to writing about the theme that interested her most of all, namely, how Germans living on both sides of the border were affected by the division of their country into a Capitalist West and a Communist East. This was a topic in which she was obviously very knowledgeable, in light of the fact that as a West Berliner she experienced first-hand the creation of the two separate, and very different German States. Much of her work and career centered around how the impact of this division changed the lives of the people living under these conditions during this particular period, especially those on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain. Through direct and implied references, the author's own views and thoughts on her topic are clearly apparent in her stories, but do not

take away from their impact as works of literature. These three specific pieces of her literary works provide excellent examples of the situation and atmosphere experienced by many Germans after the war and during the continuation of the Cold War. Through her descriptive narrations, we are brought into the world of the characters in her stories, and are shown, from several perspectives and in different circumstances, how people lived and dealt with the situation they had to confront after the division of Germany.

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