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Das Mietshaus in Brigitte Burmeister's novel
Unter dem Namen Norma:
a German microcosm.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the East Berlin tenement block in Brigitte Burmeister's novel *Unter dem Namen Norma*, and its symbolic function as an archive of the German condition from the Wilhelminian era to the present.

Situated on the corner of Marienstraße and Luisenstraße (an extension of Wilhelmstraße, where many government offices have been and will once again be housed), the house is a cornerstone of Germany, past and present. The narrator of the novel, Marianne Arends, ponders the actions and consequences of these past tenants, combining their experiences with her own imagination to reassure herself of her identity at a time when the socialist society in which she grew up is being replaced by the capitalist system of the West.

Brigitte Burmeister's book echoes the themes of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's book *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* as she looks at the way people deal with, or fail to deal with, their past. The same is true for her criticism of stereotypes. A similar link is established between the values shown by Brigitte Burmeister, and the ideas and beliefs of Christa Wolf, to whose work many parallels are drawn. The link between the suspected Stasi

informer in *Norma* and Christa Wolf's own Stasi codename reaffirms this.

Along with the Stasi story she makes up, Marianne creates two fictional characters, a 'zweites ich', Norma, who admits truths that Marianne cannot yet bring herself to accept, and a daughter, Emilia, who represents hope for the future.

To emphasise the themes of *Norma*, many images reoccur throughout the novel, and the use of leitmotifs is particularly noteworthy. True to the cyclic pattern of the book, the leitmotifs point back to the central image of the novel: the tenement block.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Hannie Winkler, without whose influence I would never have learned to appreciate German life and literature, and would most probably have studied science.

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INTRODUCTION

When the East German regime collapsed in 1989, many East German intellectuals, while welcoming the demise of the present East German system, were hoping a new attempt at a socialist system could be developed. These feelings found their most vocal expression at the demonstration of 4 November at Berlin's Alexanderplatz. Half a million people came together, making it the biggest unofficial demonstration in the DDR. The crowds were addressed by such authors as Christa Wolf, Stefan Heym and Heiner Müller, who were advocating a change in East German politics that would give the people a greater role to play. Among the authors who were not present but later expressed an agreement with the ideas put forward was Brigitte Burmeister, an author at that time still virtually unknown. Born in 1940 in Posen, Burmeister had studied Romance languages in Leipzig and from 1967 was a member of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin. Since 1983 she has been an independent author as well as a translator from French. Her first work, *Anders oder Aufenthalt in der Fremde*, appeared in East Germany in 1988. Along with many of her colleagues, Burmeister was disappointed when the cry of the people changed from 'Wir sind das Volk' to 'Wir sind ein Volk'. In a conversation with Margarete Mitscherlich, published as the book *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu* in 1991, she expresses her reaction when the election results were announced in March 1990:

"Es gab Tränen...und ich erinnere mich an ein Gemisch aus furchtbarer Enttäuschung, Wut auf die 'blöden Massen'... Es war mir zwar klar, daß ein politischer Umschwung stattgefunden hatte, von 'Wir sind das Volk' zu 'Wir sind ein Volk'. Aber in welchem Ausmaß..."¹

¹ Brigitte BURMEISTER and Margarete MITSCHERLICH: *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu - Zwei deutsche Seelen - einander fremd geworden*, Hamburg: KleinVerlag, 1991, p.109.

The interview with Margarete Mitscherlich is an attempt to come to understand each other's East or West mentalities. The analysis of the German psyche which Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich had conducted in relation to Germany's Nazi-past in *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (1967) becomes relevant once again, this time applied to the situation after the demise of the GDR. How the East German past is to be dealt with, in relation to the way the Nazi-past was or was not dealt with, is one of the topics that the two women, one from the East and one from the West, discuss. They were aiming to break down the stereotypes between the two societies by sharing their personal experiences as women, and by discussing issues such as work, families and the role that intellectuals have in society. They discuss the need for 'Trauerarbeit' in a changing society. The 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' - or lack of it - which the earlier book discusses in relation to the National-Socialist years, is revived in the later book in relation to the GDR. In Brigitte Burmeister's fictional work, the issue is taken up again and it seems as if she wanted to demonstrate how the mistakes made in relation to the Nazi past could be avoided in relation to the past of the GDR. Although the issue being dealt with is similar, because in both cases (ie. after the demise of the Third Reich and after the demise of the GDR) a need for 'Trauerarbeit' is apparent, there is a difference in the extent of participation of the general public between one system and the other. After speaking of the Nazi "Totalitarismus", Brigitte Burmeister says of the DDR Volk "[Es] hat sich nicht identifiziert mit der Führung, zu keiner Zeit... Darüber sollte kein Fackelzug

hinwegtäuschen.”² The need to deal with the past is the same, the past itself is of a different nature.

Many East German authors made a final attempt to resist the pull of West Germany, a great deal hoping to rebuild a better Socialist society, others looking towards the more welfare-orientated system in countries such as France as a model preferable to what they saw as the unfettered capitalism of their sister country. Shortly after reunification, Christa Wolf, Stefan Heym and others put together a petition ‘Für unser Land’, in which they advocated the preservation of a separate East German state. The petition was signed by over ten thousand people, including Brigitte Burmeister, but, of course, it came to nothing. As Burmeister sees it, its failure lay “nicht nur daran, daß sich der unselige Egon Krenz da lautstark hineingehängt hat”, but also because the majority, “oder wie es so schön heißt: die Menschen in der DDR, haben den schnellen Anschluß gewollt.”³

After their attempts to avoid reunification had failed, there was a delay for a year or two and then the authors returned to literature as their means of expression. Out of this debate came a number of works (*Was bleibt*, Christa Wolf (1990); *In Berlin*, Irina Liebmann (1994); *Unter dem Namen Norma*, Brigitte Burmeister (1994); *Nikolaikirche*, Erich Loest (1995); *Animal Triste*, Monika Maron (1996)) dealing with the collapse of East Germany and the aftermath of reunification. It is interesting that an overwhelming number of these works are written by women. This is hardly surprising, as in East Germany, women traditionally made up a major proportion of authors; but the high percentage of women writers expressing their views on reunification

² *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.79

³ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.72

reflects also the fact that the women had more to lose by the demise of the GDR. Eva Kaufmann⁴ clearly defines one major problem that reunification posed for authors accustomed to the security of a socialist state "DDR-Autorinnen mußten sich umstellen und einstellen auf die Bedingungen, unter denen westliche Autorinnen seit je leben, auf die Marktwirtschaft... Der Broterwerb muß durch Lesereisen, Arbeiten für Funk, Fernsehen, Film usw. usf. gesichert werden."

The need to find an alternative income uncovers other changes in the social system: A greater amount of women had been employed in East Germany than in the West, and they had had the advantage of canteen meals and of creches that were run by the state, a luxury no longer found. Another factor that the women of East Germany fought for as their country faced integration into the West German system was the right to abort an unwanted child. It is the women who by nature prefer stability to change. They are more committed to human concerns than choosing a career.

Best known of the East German female authors is certainly Christa Wolf. Her first post-unification work was eagerly awaited, as she is well known for her early stance as exemplified in *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963), in which she defended Socialism and called upon East Germans to work together in the building of a functioning, socialist society. Burmeister will have had this book in mind as she wrote *Norma*, fashioning the plot and some of her characters after those of Christa Wolf's early work and thereby showing how the game has changed, but the rules are still the same. Both Rita and Marianne follow their partners to

⁴ Eva KAUFMANN, 'Adieu Cassandra? Schriftstellerinnen aus der DDR vor, in und nach der Wende', p.222, *Women and the Wende: Social Effects and Cultural Reflections on the reunification Process*, ed. Boa and Janet Wharton, Amsterdam, Atlanta, 1994

the West, but then return to their familiar East German environment. For Rita, it is the time of the building of the Berlin Wall. For Marianne it is the time of it being torn down.

Parallels can also be drawn between *Norma* and Christa Wolf's short story *Juninachmittag* (1967). In Brigitte Burmeister's novel, the narrator's husband, Johannes, would like to spend the coming holidays in Ligurien, where they holidayed the year before. Marianne is not interested, however, and would prefer to remain closer to home, on the Baltic coast:

An der Ostsee, wiederholte ich. Wo wir uns kennengelernt haben, falls du dich Erinnerst, und kriegen konnten, die herrlichsten Ferien überhaupt und seit dem ersten Augenblick am Strand, im Wasser, nur noch Glück, sagte ich (p.104).

The ability that Marianne has to find everything she needs within the borders of East Germany makes her strikingly similar to the narrator of *Juninachmittag*. While the husband there drools over the thought of Italy, the wife enthuses over holidays spent on the Baltic coast. Within East Germany, Christa Wolf's narrator finds paradise achievable. Her family do not need to travel to the Mediterranean in order to feel the sun, smell the pine needles and watch the fruit grow:

Die Sonne...hatte schon angefangen, sein Haar zu bleichen. Im Laufe des Sommers und besonders in den Ferien an der Ostsee würde wieder jener Goldhelm zustande kommen...[...]und der süßliche Duft von fast verblühten Akazien mischte sich mit dem fremden Geruch von Macchiastauden und Pinien...⁵

Summer and winter, the child smells of herbs that its parents do not know, "die es aber geben mußte, denn das Kind roch nach ihnen". The child is a part of the

⁵ Christa WOLF, 'Juninachmittag', 1967

paradisical world, that is potentially within reach and he can already experience reality. In these texts, both Brigitte Burmeister and Christa Wolf both show a lack of need to go beyond the borders of East Germany, in as much as their protagonists find happiness at home.

Since the Wall came down, three books have been published by Christa Wolf. The first was *Was bleibt*, which came out in 1990, and still deals with the situation that prevailed at the time before the fall of the wall. The other two books deal directly with 'die Wende', first in essay form in *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* (1994) and then in the form of the fictional work, *Medea* (1996). *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* is a collection of speeches, essays, letters and journal entries that record the author's experiences and opinions between 1990 and 1994. Her disapproval of the reunification is evident as she speaks of post-1989 Berlin as "diese() vereinigte() Stadt mit ihren zwei Gesellschaften" in which "die gegenseitige Fremdheit jetzt tiefer einschneidet als vorher, als die Mauer stand, die uns auf Abstand hielt, so daß die einen die anderen bedauern, die anderen die einen beneiden konnten." Christa Wolf goes on to quote "einer von diesen ewigen Mauermalern": "ALLES WIRD BESSER, NICHTS WIRD GUT"⁶. In *Medea* the immigrants from Kolchis that make themselves a place in Corinthian society are the ones that let go of the superior Kolcher traditions and - embracing the materialism of the new society - do not mind that the city of Corinth is founded on a lie.⁷ This seems to be a parallel to the East Germans' embrace of the West, although Christa Wolf herself plays this down: "Manche Kritiker haben das Buch

⁶ Christa WOLF, *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou: Texte 1990-1994*, Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994, pp.56/7

⁷ "Es ist nämlich so: Entweder ich bin von Sinnen, oder ihre Stadt ist auf ein Verbrechen gegründet." (*Medea*, p.15). Christa WOLF, *Medea - Stimmen*, Gütersloh: Luchterhand Literaturverlag GmbH, 1996

übrigens als Kommentar zum West-Ost-Gegensatz, absurdersweise sogar als Schlüsselroman gelesen... Ich glaube in der Bearbeitungszeit des Themas seit 1992 bin ich immer weiter weg getrieben worden von den ursprünglich vielleicht sich aufdrängenden Ost-West-Vergleichen.”⁸

Like Christa Wolf, Helga Königsdorf regretted the demise of the GDR but was aware of its inevitability. Reflecting on the time before reunification, she commented: “Die besten von uns arbeiteten an korrigierten Entwürfen als es längst dafür zu spät war”.⁹ Since 1989 she has written many short stories and essays that contain a lot of ‘Ostalgie’ (nostalgic feelings for East Germany) including ‘Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen’, ‘Ohne den Ort zu wechseln, gehen wir in die Fremde’ (1990), ‘Gleich neben Afrika’ (1992) and the novel ‘Im Schatten des Regenbogens’ (1993).

While Christa Wolf and Helga Königsdorf stayed committed to their background, other East German writers, notably Monika Maron and Irina Liebmann had already moved to West Germany in the eighties. Even while she was living in East Germany, Maron had to have the more important of her fictional works published in the West. *Flugasche*, a criticism of the environmental problems at Bitterfeld, is one such work. She had already begun writing *Stille Zeile sechs* (published 1991) before the historical events of 1989, and in 1996 the book *Animal Triste* was released. It describes through a love relationship that fails the radical life-style change of a woman living in the changing society in the new united Germany. In her essayistic work, Monika Maron indicates that she wanted a united Germany,

⁸ ‘Sind Sie noch eine Leitfigur, Frau Wolf?’, *Tagesspiegel*, 30 April, 1996

⁹ As cited in Wolfgang EMMERICH, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1996, p.461

but that the reunification has not turned out as she would have liked it to.¹⁰

Irina Liebmann responded to the reunification of Germany with the novel *In Berlin* (1994). It is the story of a woman who flies back into East Berlin after spending time in Vienna on a visitor's visa. It is a love story caught up in the whirlwind of the 'Wende', and the main protagonist must question why she loses her direction once in West Berlin. Memories of her childhood mingle with events in the present, until suddenly the future is also in sight. Irina Liebmann's novel is aptly described in the blurb: "ein mutiges Buch. Sie fragt nach den Bedingungen unserer Existenz, nach den Ursachen von Blockaden und Gewalt in den privaten Beziehungen ebenso wie in den politischen Verhältnissen in Deutschland. Ein Buch, das sich ins Offene wagt."¹¹ The chapter headings of the book can almost be read as rhetorical questions that the narrator is asking herself: "Wann soll denn die Änderung eintreten?", "Aber gestern, wie war das gestern?"

This 'stream of consciousness' narration covers many of the issues found in *Norma*, and uses similar imagery:

Wer in diesem Haus schläft, schläft im rechten Winkel einer Hausecke nahe der Straßenbahn über einem Hof voller Katzen. Bei geöffnetem Fenster hört er Tiergeschrei und das Quietschen von Metall auf Metall, in Abständen füllen die Krachlawinen der Flugzeug im Anflug auf Tegel das Zimmer. Andere Geräusche der Nacht kommen von Sirenen, Lastwagen, aneinanderknallenden Waggons auf dem Rangierbahnhof (p.14)

¹⁰ "Ich selbst begann in dem Maße die deutsche Einheit zu wollen, wie die Argumente für die deutsche Teilung mir verdächtig wurden. Inzwischen ist mir die Einheit zum Alptraum geworden". Monika MARON, 'Zonophobie', *Kursbuch*, Berlin: Rowohlt, September 1992, Issue 109, p.91

¹¹ Irina LIEBMANN, *In Berlin*, Cologne: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994

The constant references to the Straßenbahn (pp.14, 18, 44, 45, etc.) and other forms of rail-wagons (S-Bahn, p.45, etc.; U-Bahn, p.130, etc.) function in a similar way to a leitmotiv, as they bring to mind Christa Wolf's book *Divided Heaven* and the themes that it encompasses. All three books discuss similar issues, as they explore how their female protagonists cope when societal changes separate them from their partners.

Like Maron and Liebmann, Helga Schubert welcomed the freedom to express opinions that came about with reunification. In *Die Andersdenkende* (1994) she writes:

Ich will doch auf eigenen existentiellen Wunsch möglichst autonom denken und handeln, und das bedeutet doch abgegrenzt und unabhängig von andern Menschen, ihre Meinung achtend, aber auch verlangend, daß sie meine Meinung anhören und respektieren, sozusagen als gleichberechtigte Stimme. (p.204)

The book is a collection of 29 texts (short stories, newspaper articles and essays) that were written between 1972 and 1993. Although she stayed in East Germany until the collapse of the Socialist state, Schubert has revealed in her post-unification prose that she was happy to whole-heartedly follow the leadership of Chancellor Kohl and to take on his vision for the future. Beth Alldred¹² calls attention to the similar background that she shares with Brigitte Burmeister, and also to their differing reactions to the Wende. Both are freelance authors that were born in 1940 and that saw problems in the East German society that they were raised in, but their opinions differ on the topic of a solution for those problems. Helga Schubert can be seen to stand at the opposite end of the spectrum to Christa Wolf. Where the former seems to represent one extreme, namely that of embracing the West

¹² Beth ALLDRED, 'Two contrasting perspectives on German unification: Helga Schubert and Brigitte Burmeister', *German Life and Letters* 50: 2 April 1997

and all that goes with it, the latter is situated at the opposite extreme: still strongly defending Socialism and grieving over the disappearance of the DDR. Where then, is Brigitte Burmeister situated on this spectrum?

That is indeed one of the major questions that I wish to address in this investigation. I will also seek to discover the intentions with which Brigitte Burmeister wrote the novel *Unter dem Namen Norma*. How is her view of the process and progress of reunification revealed in the book, and how is the past dealt with; a past which, although it has been left behind, still determines the lives of the people she describes? Are there any lessons that she has learnt from Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's work on Germany's inability to come to terms with the Nazi past that Burmeister can now apply to some extent to the reflection on another past regime? Her dialogue with Margarete Mitscherlich seems to be a hinge between the two.

The answers are contained, so it seems, in the very location which Burmeister chooses for her novel: a tenement block situated in the heart of Berlin, almost right on the line that divided East from West. Its location is also that of a street of major historical importance, so that the house seems to have witnessed and to contain this history. What are the responses from the various factions that are represented in the past and present occupants of such a house? I would like to consider how Brigitte Burmeister makes use of the milieu she has chosen to develop her ideas, and how her aesthetic approach, including the use of techniques such as the leitmotif, supports her intentions. I will also show how the book *Unter dem Namen Norma* is a response to Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich's book *Die Unfähigkeit zu*

trauern. The way of dealing, or rather *not* dealing with the past that the Mitscherlichs reject seems to be mirrored in the character of Johannes in *Norma*, and is rejected also by Burmeister. How does each character respond to the demise of the GDR, in which their identities are founded? Johannes changes his identity, refusing to waste another thought on the GDR, unlike the character Marianne, who responds by delving into the past, thereby clinging to her identity. Characteristically, as with the women authors mentioned, it is the women in the text who are given this task. Finally, after discussing the above issues, it will become evident whether or not the book that Marianne and Norma discuss in the closing moments of the novel ("Kormoran - der letzte Zeuge", p.284) refers solely to Hermann Kant's novel *Kormoran* (1994) or whether it can also be seen as the story that they themselves star in: "Ein Roman, auf den schon alle warten. Er handelt von den Abenteuern eines Arbeiterbauern in vierzig ungelebten Jahren." (p.284)

Similar to Helga Königsdorf, Christa Wolf, Monika Maron and others, Brigitte Burmeister's fictional work is embedded in a series of essays and interviews. The more important of these are:

Wir haben ein Berührungstabu (1991)

'Keine Macht, aber Spielraum' (1991)¹³

'Schriftsteller in gewendeten Verhältnissen' (1994)¹⁴

'Die Tugend der Rücksichtslosigkeit' (1994)¹⁵

'Ein Roman aus Berlin Mitte' (1995)¹⁶

¹³ Anna MUDRY (ed), *Gute Nacht, Du Schöne - Autorinnen blicken zurück*, Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand Literatur Verlag, 1991

¹⁴ Brigitte BURMEISTER, 'Schriftsteller in verwendeten Verhältnissen', *Sinn und Form*, 4/1994

¹⁵ Hella KAISER, 'Die Tugend der Rücksichtslosigkeit', *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 22.10.1994

¹⁶ Sabine KEBIR, 'Ein Roman aus Berlin-Mitte', *Lesart*, 1/95

‘Haben Sie noch die Mauer im Kopf, Frau Burmeister?’
(1995)¹⁷

The following is a summary of the views she expresses in these texts, along with selected quotations. According to Brigitte Burmeister, there is a tendency to see the German Democratic Republic as having been either black or white, and that view needs to be changed, for it is not true: “Wenn ich irgendetwas gelernt hab seit der Wende, dann, daß die ehemalige DDR alles andere als einheitlich, leicht durchschaubar, auf einen Nenner zu bringen ist”.¹⁸ It is now that unemployment, high rents, high taxes and health insurance premiums are seriously impacting on the lives of people that the security that surrounded East Germans is becoming more widely appreciated by them. The freedom of speech and movement and the availability of goods and services have come only at a price:

“Auch das Sparen von Zeit und Kraft auf dieser Ebene schlägt nicht so recht zu Buche, weil man sich rumplagen muß mit einer ausgefeilten Bürokratie, Versicherungen, Steuern, Anträgen aller Art, einem Haufen unverlangter Post und gerade, wenn wenig Geld da ist, mit der ständigen Jagd nach günstigen Möglichkeiten”.¹⁹

As Burmeister sees it, when the GDR broke apart, so did the safety, security and direction that was a part of it, leaving a vacuum, because there was no time allowed to farewell the old society while adjusting to the new:

Es hätte allenfalls die Möglichkeit gegeben, sich gemeinschaftlich eine Zeit des Ausprobierens und des Sich-Ablösens von den alten Verhältnissen zu gestatten und auch auszulernen. Das ist nicht passiert.²⁰

¹⁷ ‘Haben Sie noch die Mauer im Kopf, Frau Burmeister?’ , *Der Tagesspiegel*, 9 November 1995

¹⁸ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.117

¹⁹ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.111

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.15

Burmeister's views can perhaps be best summarised in her remarks about the present time. On life since reunification, Brigitte Burmeister comments "Mein altes Fremdheitsgefühl ist inzwischen verwandelt - in ein neues".²¹ The plight of the East Germans thrown suddenly into Western society emerges in Burmeister's book *Unter dem Namen Norma* (1994). Like Anders, the first person narrator of the author's earlier work, Marianne Arends, is condemned to an 'Aufenthalt in der Fremde'. Indeed, Arends is an anagram of Anders, a fact that critic Michael Braun draws attention to.²² Marianne's truths and memories are similar to the experiences of David Anders. Anders speaks of "Freiheit, brüderliche Liebe, Gerechtigkeit"²³ just as Marianne values "Freiheit, Gleichheit, Brüderlichkeit" (*Norma*, p.285). Like Marianne Arends (p.211), David Anders sees strangers that are "Wie aus dem Buche."²⁴ Both struggle to understand the different actions and attitudes displayed by a foreign group of people.

Burmeister has also commented specifically on *Norma*. Part of the process of adaptation to the new, reunified Germany for Marianne is to come to terms with the East German past, which should not simply be deleted from memory. Those who have grown up in the German Democratic Republic have been conditioned by the ideas and ideologies of that society. Their past cannot be swept under the mat, as the memories of fascism had been, according to Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich.²⁵ Now that all Germans may well share a

²¹ *Sinn und Form*, 4/1994, p.654

²² Michael BRAUN, 'Fremd in einem Dschungel, der Deutschland heißt', *Basler Zeitung*, Buchmessenbeilage, 5.10.1994

²³ Brigitte BURMEISTER, *Anders, oder, Aufenthalt in der Fremde; ein kleiner Roman*, Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1987

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.49

²⁵ "...Daß zwischen dem in der Bundesrepublik herrschenden politischen und sozialen Immobilismus und Provinzialismus einerseits und der hartnäckig aufrechterhaltenen Abwehr von Erinnerungen, insbesondere der Sperrung gegen eine Gefühlsbeteiligung an

common future as a nation, they must also share their past lives with one another in order to understand one another better. Only then will the mental wall between the two peoples be removed once and for all. "Immerhin" says Burmeister, "gibt es jetzt die Möglichkeit, sich die Realität anzuschauen, sie nicht nur zu messen an den Bildern, die man sich von ferne gemacht hat, oder stehenzubleiben bei den Urteilen auf den ersten Blick."²⁶ Pulling down 'die Mauer in den Köpfen'²⁷ by building up the memories is something Burmeister aims for in the writing of *Norma*: "Vor allem wollte ich wohl Erinnerungen bewahren."²⁸ The house in the novel becomes a store house of these memories.

Burmeister keeps as close to her own memories and experiences as she can, trying not to invent too much, so that she does not stray from the true memories of East Germany: "Dicht an den eigenen Erfahrungen wollte sie bleiben, möglichst wenig ausdenken"²⁹. She tries also to be tactful, so as not to offend anyone ("niemanden verletzen, nicht taktlos werden"), although she also admits she does not put much effort into the attempt "einer DDR-Mentalität Rechnung zu tragen, aber auch nicht, für Westdeutsche besonders verständlich zu sein". She realises that the book will be read differently in the East than in the West, and she finds this is a good thing,³⁰ recognising that the unity of Germany exists only on political documents at this stage. "Wer hat mit diesem Ausmaß an Fremdheit und sogar

den jetzt verleugneten Vorgängen der Vergangenheit andererseits ein determinierender Zusammenhang besteht", *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, p.9

²⁶ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.16

²⁷ A term widely used in Germany. Critic Andreas Rumler says: "Offenbar ist die deutsch-deutsche Grenze mit ihrem tödlichen Waffen-Arsenal nach der Wiedervereinigung abgelöst worden durch eine Mauer in den Köpfen der Bürger der nun vergrößerten Bundesrepublik" ('Westmenschen - "Wie im Buche"', *Deutsche Welle*, date unknown)

²⁸ Hella KAISER

²⁹ *ibid.*

Aversion gerechnet, die seither zu spüren sind?", she asks. She wishes that people's attitudes would be more of interest and respect, like when one travels in a foreign country: "Begegnung mit Neugier und Respekt, wie sie bei Reisen in fremde Länder selbstverständlich sind".³¹ Instead there are stereotypes that need to be identified and removed:

In den Verständigungsschwierigkeiten zwischen Deutschen aus Ost und West können jetzt erst die nichtideologisierten, die realen Differenzen wirklich hervortreten, Unterschiede in Erfahrungen und Mentalitäten, für deren Artikulation es keine gemeinsame Sprache gibt.³²

Brigitte Burmeister's views seem to come together in the novel *Norma*.

The response of critics to *Norma* ranges from Rainer Moritz's description of "steifer, eher biederer Prosa" to Sibylle Cramer's "welch gescheites, welch schönes Buch". I will look at the views of the critics now in more detail, paying particular attention to what they say about the tenement block and its residents.

Although she concedes that the world of the tenement block bears witness to a certain historical awareness to be found among its residents at a time of transition between the past and the future, Juliane Sattler comments: "das Fenster zum Hof öffnet ja nicht den Blick auf die große Weltpolitik"³³. I would like to disagree, as it seems to me that Burmeister wants to show precisely in which ways the 'große Weltpolitik' impacts on the lives of those that

³⁰ "Daß das Buch im Ost und West wohl 'unterschiedlich' gelesen und verstanden wird, scheint ihr sicher, ja, erstrebenswert." Hella KAISER.

³¹ Hella KAISER

³¹ Brigitte BURMEISTER, *Gute Nacht, Du Schöne*, p.36

³³ Juliane SATTLER, 'Das Fenster zum Hof', *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, 20 January 1995

Marianne watches from her window. Andreas Rumler³⁴ is closer to the mark when he comments that the house, like its inhabitants, “repräsentiert” “fast wie ein Symbol Stadt und Geschichte des Landes”. Burmeister uses the small details of the apartment block to represent wider aspects of society. Eva Kaufmann³⁵ uses the example of the stairwell to put this point across. Marianne describes the stairwell as “dämmerig und still” although her estranged husband sees the same area as “finster und öde”. “Offensichtlich”, Kaufmann points out, “spielen in diesen konträren Urteilen über ein unschuldiges Treppenhaus die gesamten Lebensorientierungen der Streitenden mit.” Burmeister’s use of small details to make much larger comments, a point I will further deal with later, is well summarised by Eva Kaufmann:

In unzähligen Details vermittelt der Roman ein Bild der allgemeinen Konfliktlage, die sich sowohl im polemisch aufgeladenen öffentlichen Diskurs als auch in der privaten Kommunikation niederschlägt.

Thomas Kraft draws a strikingly apt parallel between the apartment block and an office desk “aus dem die Erzählerin je nach Bedarf die entsprechenden Schubladen herauszieht, um ihre Geschichte vorantreiben und gleichzeitig vorsichtig abrunden zu können.”³⁶ One story that the narrator comes up with uses material from many of these drawers, but its main plot comes from her imagination. It is the story of someone who was as much a perpetrator as a victim that Marianne tells a guest at her husband’s West German party. This story has brought differing reactions from the critics. Thomas Kraft suggests that the narrator knows, as

³⁴ Andreas RUMLER, “Westmenschen - “Wie im Buche””, *Deutsche Welle DP/ZR-Kultur*, no date given

³⁵ Eva KAUFMANN, “Handlung ohne erkennbaren Grund”?, *Neue deutsche Literatur*, September/October 1994

³⁶ Thomas KRAFT, ‘Noch immer in der DDR gefangen’, *Hannoversche Allgemeine*, 18 March 1995

does Saint-Just, whose biography she translates, that "Herkunft ohne Schuld nicht sein kann".³⁷ Detlef Kuhlbrodt suggests that Marianne tells the story out of boredom at a party of glazed-faced people: "Aus Überdruß am gelangweilt dahin-plätschernden Small talk erzählt sie einer desinteressierten West-Tussi...eine ausgedachte Biographie".³⁸ To Andreas Rumler, Marianne is prevented from starting anew because of feelings of fear and inferiority.³⁹ As previously quoted, Brigitte Burmeister stresses the different reception of the book in East and West Germany. This is what Andreas Rumler has recognised when he states: "West- und Ost-Leser dürften ihre Motive je nach dem spezifischen Erfahrungshintergrund anders bewerten". Sabine Kebir speaks of "eine Heldin mit Opferakte" whose husband should realise the story is fictional "durch die Verwendung des Namens der gemeinsamen Freundin".⁴⁰

This brings us to another aspect of the novel that is interpreted differently by different critics: the existence of Norma. Sabine Kebir recognises Norma to be the "zweites Ich" of Marianne and she understands the friend to be a physical actuality. Michael Braun also sees Norma as a citizen of Berlin, one who has formed her new German identity and concept of the enemy.⁴¹ Thomas Kraft mentions Marianne's "quirilige, pragmatische Freundin Norma", Bruno Preisendörfer comments on Marianne's best friend and Leonore Schwartz sees Norma as the "Hoffnungsträgerin und Identitätsstütze" of Marianne. Other authors look closer

³⁷ Thomas KRAFT

³⁸ Detlef KULHBRODT, 'Menschen mit rosig goldener Glasur', *die tageszeitung Berlin (taz)* - Buchmessenbeilage, 5 October 1994

³⁹ Andreas RUMLER

⁴⁰ Sabine KEBIR

⁴¹ "Sowohl Max...als auch Norma, die beste Freundin, haben sich ihre neuen deutschen Identitäten und Feindbilder bereits gebildet.", Michael BRAUN

however, and describe Norma as “eine Erfindung”⁴² or “eine Erscheinung”⁴³. To back up her argument that Norma may be a figment of Marianne’s obviously active imagination, Susanne Ledanff refers to page 95 of the book; Marianne reasons with Johannes using the argument: “Weil die unsichtbaren Mauern das Wesentliche waren, braucht man über Erscheinungen wie Norma nicht zu reden”. Ledanff then goes on to question whether Norma is perhaps a “Realitätsprinzip gegen die Rationalisierungsmechanismen der Vergangenheit, die in der Gegenwart fortgesetzt werden?”

Another character that some critics have mistakenly understood to be real is Marianne’s ‘daughter’, Emilia. Detlef Kuhlbrodt, Walter Emmerich and Frank Wehdeking all describe how Marianne goes back to East Berlin and “bleibt mit der Tochter”. As Thomas Kraft points out, Marianne is childless. Emilia is imaginary, to use Marianne’s own words, the child is a “Kopfgeburt”. I will discuss this later in detail.

We have seen the intentions with which Burmeister wrote this novel and we have looked at some interpretations and misinterpretations of the critics, along with some intentions which are clearly overlooked by those who have commented on the book. Now we need to look at the book itself in closer detail and the intentions of the first person narrator, Marianne.

Like Brigitte Burmeister, Marianne, who has many things in common with Burmeister, is interested in recording memories of East Germany, so that they are not lost forever as the transition into a new society takes place. Marianne’s

⁴² Sibylle CRAMER, ‘Deutsche Zustände und die offenen Felder im Gefüge der Gegenwart’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Buchmessenbeilage, 5 October 1994

⁴³ Susanne Ledanff, p.26

stream of consciousness is full of stories of her own past, the earlier years of those who live or have lived in the tenement block and thoughts of how things used to be east of the Elbe. In her desire to uncover the past, even searching through the communal rubbish bins is not out of the question. She also considers joining the manual workers drinking beer in the garden after work, in order to ask them about the differences in pipes, vents and taps since reunification: "Nicht Preisunterschiede, sage ich, ich meine die Eigenschaften." (pp.166/7) She wonders if she could pin an advertisement to the noticeboard:

"Wer hilft mir beim Sammeln von Erinnerungen? Suche Tagebücher, Briefe, Dokumente aus vierzig Jahren. Marianne Arends, Aufgang B, vier Treppen." (p.167)

Maybe she could invite people to a discussion group with the theme "Unsere Biografien"? But these are just passing thoughts, as she imagines the wrong people coming, the wrong things being said. Finally she concludes that leading was never a strength of hers and "organisieren auch nicht" (p.170) and she pictures someone approaching her and recording her memories:

Gute Mikrophone, geschlossene Fenster, mehr ist nicht nötig. Es wird alles aufgezeichnet, in einem beliebigen Augenblick. Nichts besonderes muß gesagt werden, ganz im Gegenteil, auf die Alltagsrede kommt es an... (p.170)

One thing she has done to keep the events of the last two years, the reunification, from becoming "zwei Jahre[n] Tumult in [ihrer] Erinnerung" is to write a journal ("eine Art Chronik") of what happened. On her birthday, and the first birthday of the fall of the wall, she records individual events and their chronological order, so that she can be sure in years to come, that her memories are correct: "mir schwarz auf weiß bestätigt, daß bestimmte Ereignisse sich zugetragen hatten von einem Herbst bis zum übernächsten" (p.197). The journal gives account of

national events ("Im März fanden unsere ersten Wahlen statt"), of Marianne's own actions ("Ich unterbrach meine Arbeit, wenn im Radio eine Sitzung des zentralen Runden Tisches oder der Volkskammer übertragen wurde") and of her own opinions ("Wir mußten den Sieg der Mehrheit verwinden" - compare to Burmeister's "Wut auf die blöden Massen", p.1 above). Brigitte Burmeister herself has mentioned that she would have liked to have been able to write "eine persönliche Chronik" using a diary, but as she did not keep a diary over that time, she eagerly awaits "Erlebnisberichte" of others.⁴⁴

We move now from journal-entries to junkmail. Burmeister extends her comment about junkmail, as quoted earlier (p.12 of thesis), by making the same comment through the narrator. Marianne arrives back from West Germany to find the proof of capitalism cluttering her floor. In a society where newspapers carried no advertisements, junkmail was unheard of. Marianne notices: "Die Freunde im Urlaub schreiben wenig... Die Unbekannten aber vergessen dich nicht..." (p.187) Earlier Marianne had painted a mental picture for Max about how she could imagine the future: Johannes with a new wife and perhaps a little child. She describes the "bunten Vorlagen" and a table set for breakfast in the garden. The junkmail is to her a symbol of the West and the capitalism that it embraces. This parallels with Burmeister's own views, as expressed in the interview with Margarete Mitscherlich:

"Auch das Sparen von Zeit und Kraft auf dieser Ebene schlägt nicht so recht zu Buche, weil man sich rumplagen muß mit einer ausgefeilten Bürokratie, Versicherung, Steuern, Anträgen aller Art, einem Haufen unverlangter Post..."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Brigitte BURMEISTER/Gerti TETZNER, 'Keine Macht, aber Spielraum', *Gute Nacht, Du Schöne*, p.56

⁴⁵ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabus*, p.111

Seen in context with a comment made earlier, Brigitte Burmeister's view of the "glänzender, glatter, geplegter" side of the capitalist West is not necessarily condemning: but it was a "sinnlich wahrnehmbarer Unterschied, anziehend und abstoßend, insgesamt spannend".⁴⁶

Marianne's curiosity of the Hausmeister, Kühne, is typical of her interest in people's pasts. Together with Norma, she tries to guess what sort of life he has led, and pastes a possible past to him. Norma suggests that Marianne ask him outright, but she considers the idea stupid: "So naiv kann nur Norma sein." (p.19) Marianne's quest for memories is hindered by her passiveness. She imagines conversations with people, yet she never initiates them: for her it is more comfortable to research alone. The letters she reads are the decades of correspondence to the sisters Minnie and Ella König, who once resided in the tenement block, from a friend now living in America. It amuses Norma that it is not where they are buried that interests Marianne, but rather which sister pencilled in her and her sister's eyebrows. Marianne tries to explain to Norma that that act would have been "Die letzte Linie des Widerstands", a faint mark of protest. (p.27) Eye-liner is the last link that they had with the 'golden twenties' that they grew up in. They did not feel at home in either the Third Reich or the German Democratic Republic. I will look further into this in the following chapter.

Of her own past, Marianne remembers, among other things, her time working in the factory in her student years, and the holidays spent on Rügen. One very vivid recollection is that of the "Volksaufstand" on 17 June 1953. What she retells is the story of a child who keeps her opinions from her communist friend not for fear of the friend informing

⁴⁶ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.74

the Stasi, but because she did not want to lose the friendship: "Sie hätte mit die Freundschaft gekündigt, wenn ich sie zu meiner, mich zu ihrer Gegnerin erklärte - das stellte ich mich vor, nichts anderes, und davor hatte ich Angst." (p.69)

This is also the first example of the second area of Marianne's intentions, following her desire to record the memories of the GDR. The book is framed by three 'revolutions': the French revolution, the uprising in East Germany in 1953 and the process of reunification which is, in Marianne's opinion, still under way socially, if not politically. The French revolution failed morally, in Marianne's view, due to the bloody terror involved, and the 1953 uprising was brutally squashed, but the end of the book ends optimistically, as Marianne considers how the third could succeed.

The book is divided into two large chapters. The first is titled simply "Am 17. Juni", and brings with it the associations of the 1953 uprising. Although the workers that initiated the riots in East Berlin and throughout the cities of the Soviet Zone did succeed in temporarily delaying the increase of work quotas, their rebellion had more far reaching consequences. By the end of the day it was obvious that the Soviet Union was prepared to allow their military presence to squash any attempt to destabilise the system, and it was equally obvious that West Germany and the Western powers were not willing to do anything about that. For every political prisoner that was freed, more were imprisoned, and although the party underwent purges, it merely made the SED stronger. The people were asking for social changes, but the changes they got were political, and were not necessarily an improvement. Ulbricht took the opportunity to throw out

any remaining politicians who were not Communist hard-liners. It is not the political consequences that stand out in Marianne's memory forty years later. It is the social aspects: how her mother couldn't get to her school because of the demonstrations in the centre city, how they had to stay at home that evening, and could hear gunfire from the house, and how she kept quiet about her opinion that the uprising was a cry for freedom, because she feared losing a friendship: "Unsere Freundschaft hielt, solange wir den Graben links liegen ließen", she tells Max, her lover.

The second chapter of the book is headed with the title 'Am 14. Juli', and therefore brings with it the associations of the storming of the Bastille on that day in 1789. The theme of the French revolution is carried through to the book that Marianne is presently translating, which is a biography of the revolutionary, Antoine de Saint-Just. Of Brigitte Burmeister's use of this era of French history, Christine Cosentino comments: "Wahrnehmung und Akzeptanz fußen auf den vielversprechenden utopischen Anfängen der französischen Revolution, die die Ich-Erzählerin im Jugendbildnis des Saint-Just am reinsten ausgeprägt sieht."⁴⁷ On 17 June, Marianne is in the process of translating the chapter "Die Schönheit der Jugend", dealing with the utopian ideals of Saint-Just and the 1789 storming of the Bastille. Later, as she tries to integrate into the West in the year 1992, she is translating the events of the "Terrorjahr 1792" which ends with the death of not only Ludwig XVI, but also the death of Saint-Just himself. Marianne explains to Norma how Saint-Just "glaubte wie sein Freund Maximilien Robespierre an die vorläufige

⁴⁷ Christine Cosentino, 'Ostdeutsche Autoren Mitte der neunziger Jahre', *Germanic Review* 71/3, Summer 1996,

Notwendigkeit des Terrors im Dienste der Tugend.” (*Norma*, p.270) This phrase is significant in two ways.

Firstly, it is a phrase that was often used by the leaders of Communism, especially in the time of Stalin. Translated to the East German situation, it was used, for instance, to excuse and explain the hardships that the people had to endure. The five year plan of 1952 focused on the building up of heavy industry in Eastern Germany, while allowing for only the minimum production of consumer goods. As a result, while their brothers in the West were experiencing the Economic Miracle, East Germans were struggling to get by. The constant excuse given by the Stalinists was that this time of hardship was necessary in order to bring about a better Socialist future. By 1989, such a notion was utterly rejected even by those who still wanted a new Socialism in the German Democratic Republic after 1989. Their ideal was now a ‘Socialism with a human face’ on the model of the short lived Prague Spring of 1968.

Secondly, the idea of “die vorläufige Notwendigkeit des Terrors im Dienste der Tugend” echoes a conversation overheard by Marianne a month earlier. Two men were discussing present times, and one commented that “Köpfe hätten rollen müssen. Hier auf dem Alex, wo die Brillenträger Revolution gespielt haben.” He is referring to the demonstrations led by intellectuals such as Christa Wolf in October 1989, and suggests that if shots had been fired as the German Democratic Republic collapsed, the

conditions now would be clearer. Instead of blood flowing, compromises were reached.⁴⁸

Marianne's opposing stance on this is clearly shown later on. She quotes Saint-Just's statement "Das Glück ist ein neuer Gedanke in Europa", and Norma suggests this as a good theme for Max to speak on when sealing the 'Freundschaftsbund' between the two women. The phrase itself is not new, but it still applies, as it was never fulfilled. The phrase "Freiheit, Gleichkeit, Brüderlichkeit" is also used.⁴⁹ Marianne would like to see the positive values that the French revolution stood for developed in the new, reunified Germany, and she sees that as possibility, encouraged by the fact that for once, a 'bloodless revolution' had led to the overthrow of the old regime. Her intention is to ensure that the events will have a better ending this time.

As Marianne sees it, the breaking down of stereotypes and the building up of friendships between those with different backgrounds are essential elements if "das Glück" is to be truly established in Europe. This is to be carried out by acknowledging that no one, oneself included, is innocent enough to cast the first stone. Following on from that, one must sweep before one's own door before trying to improve the lot of others. One must resist the choice between forgetting on the one hand or clinging to one's hate on the other:

Und wir selbst...sind so unschuldig nicht, daß wir den ersten Stein werfen dürfen. ...Halten wir dennoch den Besen fest, mit dem wir vor der eignen Tür zu kehren haben! Lassen wir uns nicht beirren, nach dem eigenen Platz in der großen Verstrickung zu fragen, nach der Mitschuld unseres Formats!

⁴⁸ *Norma*, p.81

⁴⁹ *Norma*, p.285

Widerstehen wir der Wahl zwischen vergessen und
hundert Jahren Haß!⁵⁰

After this speech by Max Marianne is moved "wie Tante Ruth es gewesen war nach einer guten Predigt". She has seen first-hand how destructive 'die Mauer im Kopf' can be. Unable to come to terms with the stereotypical elements of her husband's West German friends, she finally created a story to complete a picture of herself to fit the mold the West Germans have of those from the East. Or maybe to become what *she* considered to be the West German view. Together with her 'zweites Ich', Norma, she often created backgrounds for the people that she observed in day-to-day life. As July 14 draws to an end, however, she finds she no longer wants to pin any history to a person if it is not their own:

Keinem, auch dem Langhaarigen nicht, konnte ich eine wahre Geschichte anhängen, die nicht seine war. Aber niemals wieder würde ich eine erfinden. Morgen das Buch wieder aufschlagen und weiter übersetzen dort, wo Johannes mich gestern Abend unterbrochen hatte, im Kapitel über Saint-Just und seine Freunde. (p.270).

Here, Marianne seems to pay attention the words of Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich, who put forward the question: "Wie kommt es denn zu derart unerschütterlichen Überzeugungen, in denen sich Bruchstücke von Realität und unsere Einbildung vermengen?" (*Die Unfähigkeit...*, p.135). The Mitscherlichs' and Brigitte Burmeister's answer to this question will be examined in a later chapter.

Eva Kaufmann picks up on the main protagonist's yearning for "Sprechen ohne Hintersinn und Nebenton" without "die alten Töne der Kritik" and "die neuen der Rechtfertigung" (*Norma*, p.10). She sees this, quite rightly, as an intention of the book. Marianne wants to be able to speak

⁵⁰ *Norma*, p.282

the truth plainly, without having to disguise it or hide it.

We have seen that Marianne's intentions as she is faced by a changing society are to collect memories of the people and circumstances in the society she grew up in, to promote in her own life values that will help form the most promising future, and to break down the barriers that remain between East and West Germans. Instead of an 'Unfähigkeit zu trauern', which shuts out the past, she seems to demonstrate a real capacity for making the past come alive. The revolutions that frame these intentions are seen within the framework of the tenement block as the dates around which the action of the book is structured are 17 June and 14 July.

In the following chapters, I will show to what extent Brigitte Burmeister has realised her intentions in the writing of *Unter dem Namen Norma*, how her view of reunification is revealed through the novel, and how she uses her chosen milieu to develop these ideas. After my investigation, it should be possible to see in which ways *Norma* is a response to the book *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, and to see also what each of these books have to say about dealing with the past and avoiding stereotyping. I will then respond to Burmeister's critics.

I will begin the first chapter with the central image of the novel; the East Berlin tenement block. After showing its locational and historical significance, I will go on to examine the actual residents of this building in the second and third chapters, revealing how past residents have dealt with the transition from one type of society to another. The fourth chapter will look at imaginary characters in the novel, and the significance that they have in the life of

the main protagonist. The leitmotifs used will then be followed as they appear throughout the novel, thus showing their importance to both the themes and the whole aesthetic value of the text.

CHAPTER ONE - THE TENEMENT BLOCK AS A STOREHOUSE OF HISTORY

The tenement block, which I will now examine in greater detail, is the central image of the novel. The narrator, Marianne, works from home, translating the biography of Saint-Just and at the same time observing the people that pass through the courtyard everyday. It is from this perspective that she recalls the events of the day and ponders over the past. The window overlooks the courtyard, which in turn is surrounded by the tenement block.

The location of the building is significant, as it stands in the centre of Berlin, for the last one hundred years Germany's largest and most historically-prominent city. The history of the people that live in or have lived in the house is what makes the history of the city and in turn, much of the history of Germany. The opening sentence of *Norma* tells us: "Es ist ein großes Haus, hundert Jahre alt." Having stood for one hundred years, the building must have sheltered residents during the many different epochs that together span that time. Many of Theodor Fontane's characters lived in such a house, and E.T.A. Hoffmann lived in a street just a few blocks from Marienstraße. In fact, in Hoffmann's last Erzählung, *Des Vetters Eckfenster*, the narrator looking down on Gendarmenmarkt from his 'Eckfenster', is just streets away from Marianne's house and uses a similar perspective. How many Prussian aristocrats, and officers, how many representatives of Berlin's pre-World War One bourgeoisie passed through the door of Marianne's apartment building; a door which S. Cramer refers to as "das Portal der Erzählung"? How many mothers later mourned from there the tragic deaths of sons as the two World Wars tore Europe apart? Each resident would have responded differently to

the Kapp-Putsch and to the Weimar years, finding different ways to cope as the house was scantily heated in the Depression of 1929. How many portraits of Hitler were taken off the inner walls of the house and used for warmth as the end of a second 'total war' left the country lacking many consumer items? The house is a few doors away from Wilhelmstraße, the hub of political activity in the Kaiser- and Weimar period, and is a stone throw away from the Brandenburg Gate and the wall that divided Berlin. It is a container in which the history of Germany is concentrated. If only the walls could talk: with Marianne's help, they can.

Set in these walls are windows that look out over an area of Germany where many political decisions have been and will once again be made. The building stands on the corner of Marienstraße and Luisenstraße, an extension of Wilhelmstraße (p.210). Under the East German government, Luisenstraße was renamed after the East German politician, Hermann Matern (1893-1971), who was arrested in 1933 and emigrated from the Third Reich in 1934. He later became "als Vorsitzender der wichtigen Zentralen Parteikontrollkommission enger Vertrauensmann Ulbrichts." (Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexikon, v.15, p.742).

Since reunification, the street has been "zurückgetauft...auf den Namen, der bis zur vorherigen Korrektur in den blauen Personalausweisen der langjährigen Hausbewohner gestanden hatte." The same is true of Wilhelmstraße, which bore the name of Otto Grotewohl, the SPD leader forced to merge his party with the KPD to form the SED in 1946. The East German officials no doubt chose with care the street they named after Grotewohl; replacing the first ruler of the united German states with the man whose historic handshake with Wilhelm Pieck became the

emblem of the SED, thereby symbolising for forty years the founding of East Germany. Both streets can now identify once again with their Prussian past, as the more recent traditions are now eliminated.

Auguste Wilhelmine Amalie LUISE was born in Hannover in 1776. She married the later king Friedrich Wilhelm III and became Prussian queen, much beloved and - after her early death - exalted by the people, not unlike Diana, Princess of Wales. One of her sons was Wilhelm, king of Prussia and then, as Kaiser Wilhelm I, the first emperor of Germany when it was originally united in 1871, and after whom Wilhelmstraße was named. Wilhelmstraße once housed many government institutions, notably the Foreign Office and when the transfer back to Berlin from Bonn is complete, it will do so again. Many foreign embassies are situated nearby. Lothar Heinke gives a clear description of this historic street:

Die Wilhelmstraße, als Geschichtsmeile einzigartig in dieser Stadt, hat zwei Gesichter. Im Osten erzählen die Stadtführer mit Fotomappen in der Hand von Preußens Ministerien, von Bismarck, Adenauer, Hindenburg, von Hitler, Führerbunker und Reichskanzlei, vom Luftfahrtministerium, von Göring, Grotewohl, Haus der Ministerien und Treuhand. ... Hinter der Mauer, im Kreuzberger Teil, setzt sich die Freilichtschau deutscher Geschichte fort: Heute bilden Himmlers Ruinen bei der Topografie des Terrors, die Mauer an der Niederkirchner-Straße, der Preußische Landtag und der nahe Potsdamer Platz, an dem drei Bezirke zusammenstoßen, ein Geschichtsensemble, das in seiner Einzigartigkeit über kleinliche Bezirksgrenzen erhaben zu sein scheint.⁵¹

Wilhelmstraße was itself divided during the time that Berlin and Germany were both divided. While the original name was retained for the stretch of road that lay west of the dividing wall, the side that saw the wall's afternoon shadow was given a new identity.

⁵¹ Lothar HEINKE, 'Wichtig ist, daß der Bürger keine Nachteile hat.', *Tagespiegel*, Berlin, 29 June 1997

It is significant that this street carries not only the past history of Germany, but also the present history. As Lothar Heinke mentions, the institution known as 'Treuhand' had its central office on Wilhelmstraße, in the former Luftfahrtministerium of Hermann Göring. The first democratically elected government in the German Democratic Republic handed over all the state-owned enterprises of that state to the Treuhandanstalt in the summer of 1990. These included not only the Volkseigene Betriebe, but also estates and properties of the parties and mass organisations. Treuhand was entrusted with around 8500 Staatsbetriebe and four million employees. The Treuhandanstalt was in the crossfire of the critics for some time, as the privatisation and restructuring of the East German industry took too long for the West Germans and was carried through too quickly for the East Germans, who feared unemployment and social disintegration.⁵² This topic is more widely discussed by Günter Grass in his novel *Ein weites Feld*.⁵³

The close proximity of the Mietshaus to the Reichstag is mentioned on page 25, when the burning of that building is referred to by Marianne:

-Riechst du das? fragte ich und zeigte mit dem Kopf zur schwarzen Wand.

Norma antwortet nicht, Sie sog die Luft ein, blähte die Nasenflügel und verdrehte die Augen, daß ich das Weiße glänzen sah. Dann bleib sie stehen und rief: Es brennt!

...

-Viel zu einfach, sagte ich. Außerdem kann das Prachtstück verkohlen, es wäre ja nicht zum ersten Mal.

-Aber die Folgen! rief Norma, nun wirklich aufgeregt. Denk doch an die Folgen!

-Die Geschichte wiederholt sich nicht.

⁵² Birgit BREUEL, 'Treuhandanstalt: Bilanz und Perspektiven', *Das Parlament*, 28 October 1994, p.14ff

⁵³ Günter GRASS, *Ein weites Feld*, Göttingen:Steidl, 1995

-Genau, sagte Norma schnell. Und deshalb brennt auch nicht das, was du denkst, sondern, einige Nummern kleiner...

The consequence of the Reichstag fire in 1933 was that Hitler, already in power, was able to pin the blame on the Communists, and thereby take full, direct control of Germany without facing resistance or losing the trust of the people. Perhaps Norma is hinting that another takeover, on a smaller scale, could happen now, like that causing the disappearance of the East German way of life, swallowed by the lifestyle of the West. Marianne pretends not to be interested and the matter of a fire is left to smolder.

If it is near the Reichstag, it follows that the tenement block must be near the Brandenburg Gate. This monument was a symbol of division during the Cold War years. The Berlin Wall stood just metres in front of it, so its pillars were beyond the reach of both those in the West and those in the East. No-man's-land extended to Potsdamer Platz, a wasteland ("ein Tummelplatz für die Kaninchen") sitting between the East and the West, where firearms were used: ("von der Schußwaffe wurde Gebrauch gemacht", p.7). What the firearms were used for is not stated specifically, but as there were rabbits there until people were allowed to cross the land again, it seems that the reference is to preventing escapes to the West, rather than to rabbit-potting.

Brigitte Burmeister's resolve to keep as close to her own experience as possible (H. KAISER) is reflected in the situation of the house. On her first visit to West-Berlin in 1987, Burmeister visited the border from that side: "Ich wollte meine Wohnung mal von der 'anderen' Seite

sehen.” (H. KAISER) Burmeister lives in a house very similar to the one that she writes about in *Norma*.

Like many other such buildings in Berlin, the house in which Marianne lives has many different apartments and courtyards. The front apartments are more expensive, as they are larger and have more light. The apartments on the side wings of the house are not as nice as those at the front, but the worst are the dark, narrow rooms at the back. This particular house has five entrances. (p.7) Marianne lives at an apartment that is accessed by entrance ‘B’ (B for Burmeister, perhaps?), and lives on the fourth floor. The floor above is the attic, from which Marianne hears noises: “Es spukt unter dem Dach des alten Mietshauses”, tells us Sibylle Cramer. Marianne hears the ghosts of the past and she records what she sees when she gazes out her window. This double perspective allows her to develop the history of this focal point in Berlin while also developing the individual history of the people in the house.

Descriptions of the house in the book reveal a building that is old, drab and in need of repair. Marianne speaks of one of the apartments that is “noch finsterer als unsere erste” (p.21) and goes on to say of the tenement block: “weil das alte Haus zwar nicht mitten unter den Totschlägern, ihnen jedoch nahe genug stand...” The building is ugly (“seine Häßlichkeit kolossal” p.7) and grey (“so rissig und grau, wie die Decke aussieht” p.215) and one look at the house suggests that its residents must be “eine graue, grämliche Masse” (p.7), a term often used by West Germans to describe East Germans in general, and used specifically, and with ironic overtones, by Margarete

Mitscherlich in her interview with Brigitte Burmeister⁵⁴. By using this term, Burmeister is emphasising that the house and its tenants are together a symbol of the old German Democratic Republic, while also reconfirming the similarities between her own and Margarete Mitscherlich's ideas.

The house seems all the more dilapidated when compared to the clean, green picture given of the West, where Johannes now lives. "Die dunkelgrünen Hecken", "das rötliche Pflaster" (p.205), "den schönen Häusern" (p.211), "der Granitboden glänzte wie frisch gewaschen" (p.206). Everything that is falling apart in the East has been spruced up in the West. The cramped quarters of East Berlin housing (the Schäfers have been living in a two room apartment with their three children, p.21) are compared to the vast personal space that is available to each member of Johannes' West German neighbourhood in the opulent Rhineland: "In der Straße hier wohnten weniger Menschen als in den Aufgängen A bis E bei mir zu Hause." (p.210)

On first impressions, it would seem that Marianne prefers the comforts of the West. By digging deeper, however, we uncover reasons why she eventually chooses to return to the East. The condition of the tenement block is relative. To Johannes, who was never at home during the best part of the day (p.10), who has cut himself off from his past and who is now experiencing summer in a spacious suburb, the stairwell is "finster und öde". Marianne, on the other hand, values her past and has spent many hours working from home. She considers their apartment to be quite bright in the mornings and thinks of the stairwell as "dämmerig und still" (p.8), a phrase that arouses thoughts of personal

⁵⁴ *Wir haben ein Berührungstapu*, p.66

warmth and shelter. The poem 'Abendlied' by Matthias Claudius is brought to mind:

Wie ist die Welt so stille
und in der Dämmerung hülle
so traulich und so hold!
Als eine stille Kammer,
wo ihr des Tages Jammer
verschlafen und vergessen sollt.⁵⁵

Like Matthias Claudius' Kammer, the stairwell to Marianne is cosy and friendly, and in Marianne's case, it leads her to her apartment where she can retreat from the cares of the day. The Germans traditionally value a secure, comfortable atmosphere, and this is what the author picks up on.

It is also brought to the readers attention that it is particularly in the light of capitalism that the buildings in eastern Germany appear so old and ugly. Before there was an alternative, people were happy to make do. The Schäfer family, for example, give up their two-room 'Wohnung', "die ihnen immer genügt und gefallen hatte" to move into the newest "Neubaugebiet" (p.21). Also, it is only "in neuem Licht" that the ugliness of the tenement block "kolossal erscheint" (p.7).

Perhaps what motivated Marianne's decision to stay more than anything else was her inability to see beyond the manicured façades of the West German houses: "Wenn ich an den schönen Häusern vorüberging, in deren Inneres meine Vorstellung nicht reichte, freute ich mich auf die Heimkehr zu den Vorläufigkeiten." (p.211) Brigitte Burmeister's use of the word 'Vorläufigkeiten' is important. That which is vorläufig is still open to change. It is open for a new future. There is no room for change when something is

⁵⁵ Matthias CLAUDIUS, as cited in *The Penguin Book of German Verse*, edited by Leonard Foster, Suffolk: Penguin Books, 1957

perfect and finished. In returning to 'Vorläufigkeiten', Marianne is also returning to utopian hopes. She yearned for familiar surroundings, where she knows her neighbours and makes it her business to keep up with their every move. In the West it was different: "Inselchen mit Bewohnern, die viel Platz um sich hatten und den Nachbarn nicht zu nahe traten. Es blieb mir verschlossen, womit sie sich beschäftigten, es ging mich nichts an." (p.210)

The characters of the West Germans will be developed in a later chapter, but a few points need to be made here. Just as she cannot see past the façade of the houses, she cannot see past the "Glasur über den Gesichtern" of the people. "Sie sind so reserviert," she tells Johannes, "jede Familie für sich und alle zusammen eine geschlossene Gesellschaft, zu der Fremde keinen Zutritt haben." (p.211) Johannes is wise in his reply that it is normal to see people this way when one is new, and that she will see things differently in a few months. Marianne does not wait a few months, however, and at the party she still feels like an outsider. Silvia Erlenbacher invites her to come and visit sometime, but the law student is so seldom home that Marianne cannot take up the invitation.

Because the houses in Johannes' street are new, they do not hold the generations of history that the tenement block in East Berlin is an archive of. Marianne cannot see inside them, because there is no history there to see. In the same way, she believes rightly or wrongly, that the people are also superficial. She criticises the way that Johannes has severed himself from the past, and questions whether the new life is worth the sacrifice of the old. To her, the community feeling of the people in the apartment block is worth more than the benefits of individual bungalows. Neighbours seldom speak to one another in the West, for

they pass each other's houses almost only when behind the chrome frame of their cars. To Marianne, there does not seem to be any history behind the West Germans, just as the houses on that side of the wall do not seem to have any history.

In the image of the tenement block in central Berlin, therefore, Brigitte Burmeister combines past history (including the Wilhelminian era, the two World Wars and the foundation of the German Democratic Republic) with present history (notably the collapse of the regime in East Germany and the establishment of the Treuhandanstalt). Situated in the hub of Berlin life, the building has housed a century of tenants, and its typical structure of side wings and courtyards seems even more drab when described parallel to the West German suburb in which Johannes now lives. Where Johannes finds the East Berlin building "finster und öde", however, Marianne experiences it as "dämmerig und still", echoing the traditional German desire for secure, comfortable surroundings. The building is a mirror of German history, reflecting the attitudes and aspirations of all who have passed beneath its portals.

CHAPTER TWO - IDENTITY ANCHORED IN THE PAST

I will now take a closer look at the past and present tenants of the East German house. When Marianne sees the individuals that make up the whole of the tenement community, she sees the struggles and achievements that contribute to each one. The seemingly "graue, grämliche Masse" becomes a spectrum of laughing, colourful individuals, of whom the only common component is the address that they share. Each of these individuals contributes characteristics that when mixed in the melting pot of the house, represent the people and epochs of Germany. The present tenants depict the patterns of thought and the way of life in the contemporary society, and they also carry with them the memories of years gone by. These memories may be of their own experiences, or they may be the stories they have gleaned from those who no longer reside in the house. With the help of these memories, triggered often by items that the past tenants have left behind, we can get a glimpse of life right back to when the house was new.

The afore-mentioned König sisters lived in the house before its facade became weathered and its staircases worn. In reading the letters that the sisters received over the years from the ex-patriot, Claire, now living in California, Marianne is taken back to their childhood years before World War I. A 'Pfingstkarte' from Minnie König (p.155) refreshes childhood memories of Whitsun in Claire, who moved to the United States of America with her new husband in 1927, and Marianne contemplates who of the present tenants would also be old enough to remember the ditches or ponds from which Kalmus (reeds for making panflutes) was picked. No one, she concludes. Oral history of this time can no longer be found, but through

the letters and postcards that Marianne has salvaged, the memories are kept alive, while Marianne's own memories of later times are simultaneously stimulated (for example, the absence of oranges in the GDR is recalled on page 131).

While the Second World War is not mentioned directly in the letters, the consequences of those years were obviously carried with the König family ever afterwards. By reaping information from a letter (October 1946, p.132) and from Marianne's recollection of a conversation with Ella, we learn that there was a brother, Erich, who was in some way handicapped and lived in a nursing home. When a picture falls from the wall shortly after visits to the home are denied by the Nazi authorities, the family know Erich's fate. The official report on the death is dismissed as a lie. Erich is the victim of a system that allows the survival of only the fittest. Ella explains it to Marianne in one sentence: "Den hat der Hitler auf dem Gewissen." (p.132)

The family do not seem to talk about the loss of Erich. In the death notice printed in the paper, they ask for 'stilles Beileid', effectively closing the nature of the death as a topic. Ella mentions Erich's death to Marianne in just the one, short sentence quoted above. The passing of time has not made this issue any easier to remember. Brigitte Burmeister, however, shows in this section that she considers it to be extremely important that the events of the past need to be dealt with before a healthy future can be reached. As Margarete Mitscherlich states in *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu* (p.10), "Nur die Erinnerung befreit". Brigitte Burmeister uses many different situations in *Norma* to show this, and I shall deal with each one in turn, beginning here with Ella, Minnie and Erna.

Erna is a further member of the König family; a third sister. It seems that she had never dealt with the death of Erich, and that she had never worked through the issues that arose from that tragedy. In old age or illness the past comes back to haunt her. Terrified of falling to the same fate as her brother, Erna refuses to leave the apartment or to be left alone there. She is not going to die in a nursing home like Erich, she tells her sisters. The echoes of the past keep Erna trapped in her apartment: "aus der niemand sie fortbringen würde, bevor der Vater im Himmel sie zu sich rief" (p.131). She has not been able to move on from the Third Reich, so cannot start a new life in the GDR.

Claire, the author of the letters, moves away from her past. Born Clara Lentz, Claire marries in 1927 and moves to America (p.132). The anglicising of her name shows us that she has made a cut with the German way of life that she grew up with. Our name symbolises our identity, and she was willing to sacrifice that in order to fit into a new way of life. The name Lentz means spring, a time of new beginnings, but Claire never lets go of the past. It soon becomes clear through her letters that despite twelve rooms and a view of the Pacific, she is carrying her past around with her. She gives her labourers names that come from German ("Das Wort [Kalmus] wenigstens war geblieben, dem mexikanischen Nachfolger des schwarzen Blitzjungen zugefallen." p.156) and she decorates her American house to look very European: another ex-patriot tells her; "ich bin hier in deinem Haus, liebe Claire, mehr in Deutschland denn in Bonn." Bonn can be seen as the symbol of an Americanised West Germany. It is not far from where Johannes is now living.

Claire made the same move sixty years ago that Johannes is making now. They both cut themselves off from their past in order to start a new life. With Claire, the need to leave the past behind is symbolised by her change of name, while with Johannes, it is shown by him having shaved off his beard. Both these actions indicate that the person involved wants to start the new life with a new identity, not wanting to carry with them the world views that they identified with in the past. (The German idioms 'Der Bart ist ab' (water under the bridge) and 'So ein Bart' (indicating length and carrying the meaning 'old history') give strength to this image.) In this way, both are opting to tackle the demise of the GDR in the manner that Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich criticise in relation to the demise of the Third Reich in their book *The Unfähigkeit zu trauern*:

Die [Gefühles-] Starre zeigt die emotionelle Abwendung an; die Vergangenheit wird im Sinne eines Rückzugs alles lust- oder unlustvollen Beteiligtseins an ihr entwirklicht, sie versinkt traumartig. Diese quasi-stoische Haltung, dieser schlagartig einsetzende Mechanismus der Derealisierung des soeben noch wirklich gewesenen Dritten Reiches, ermöglicht es dann auch im zweiten Schritt, sich ohne Anzeichen gekränkten Stolzes leicht mit den Sieger zu identifizieren. Solcher Identitätswechsel hilft mit, die Gefühle des Betroffenseins abzuwenden, und bereitet auch die dritte kollektiven Anstrengungen des Wiederaufbaus, vor.

The parallel between the postwar theories of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich and the postwende theories of trained East German psychotherapist Hans-Joachim Maaz is drawn by Alison Lewis in her article 'Unity Begins Together'⁵⁶ Speaking of Maaz's idea of the suppression of the inner problems of the self, Lewis maintains:

Here Maaz is rehearsing the socio-psychological theories of Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich who attempted to establish links between the suppression

⁵⁶ Alison LEWIS, 'Unity Begins Together: Analysing the Trauma of German Unification', *New German Critique*, volume 64, 1995

of guilt and the pursuit of material success in the immediate postwar era of the Federal Republic. In his other works *Der Gefühlsstau...* [Berlin: Argon, 1990] and *Das gestürzte Volk...* [Berlin: Argon, 1991], Maaz attempts to account for the deforming effects of the years of tutelage and repression under an "authoritarian-totalitarian state system" on the collective psyche of the East German populace.

Like Brigitte Burmeister, Maaz sees that the theories established by the Mitscherlichs in relation to the West German experience after the Second World War can be drawn upon when studying the response of the East German society to reunification.

In order to catch a glimpse of the future, Brigitte Burmeister introduces briefly the character Fräulein Kunz (p.214). With a new hair-style, a new way of life and a run-of-the-mill name, Fräulein Kunz (i.e. "Hinz und Kunz", like the English "Smith and Jones") is no longer the timid house-cleaner that spoke more Russian than German. She has attained a new character, a West German, complete with a glazed face, as Marianne would maintain. Her name identifies her with the West Germans around her.

Just as Claire's maiden name, Lentz, identifies with springtime, the name König suggests being trapped in the royalist tradition of pre-Weimar days. Marianne recalls asking herself "ab wann für sie das Leben, die Zeit gleichgültig wurden, eine leere Bewegung, sozusagen". We know that the König family could not relate to Hitler's Germany, but saw through the persuasive speeches and recognised the corrupted ideals. They saw through the lies that surrounded Erich's death. As time moved on and a new political system held the country in its grip, their loyalty remains with the pre-Hitler years of the monarchy and of the Weimar Republic. They show a similar inability to integrate into the post-war life of Communist East-

Germany. "Ihre Wohnung war ein Museum für Kriegsnarben", Marianne tells Norma. The building next door was bombed in the war, and the fire that followed jumped across to the neighbouring roof. Watermarks from extinguishing the fire were still visible in the König sisters' apartment at the time that Marianne was acquainted with the ladies. The new tenants have since painted over them (p.28f).

It is at this point that the use of eyeliner ties in. I mentioned earlier how Marianne considered that lines drawn under the eyes of these aging ladies were "die letzte Linie des Widerstands". When Norma asks her friend "Wessen Widerstand?" (p.28), the answer is given at random: "Der Farbe oder des Gedächtnisses...oder der Weiblichkeit". Each of these summarises a valid point, as does the suggestion that something must be done to fight the decline ("Irgend etwas hat sich gegen den Verfall gewehrt").

The gripping of a colour (der Farbe) relates to the idiomatic phrase: nailing one's colours to the mast (Farbe bekennen). It is holding onto one's identity. The König sisters cannot identify with the society that they live in, so their identity is still bound to the time between the wars, "als sie jung waren und die Mäntel neu und sie sich vor dem Ausgehen ein bißchen angemalt, die Augenbrauen nachgezogen haben." (p.28) To let go is to lose oneself in the changes that have rocked the land. Instead they live in the world of the memory (des Gedächtnisses) of that time, never following a new path in the new society (as we

are shown in the short story 'Abendspaziergang'⁵⁷). They resist the chance to create new memories to be stored with the old ones. They do not seek out a new route for their evening walks, but continue to take the old one, no matter how drab it has become (p.33).

That they were resisting the waning of their femininity (der Weiblichkeit) is also a valid suggestion made by Marianne. This is where they drew the line, as it were, to aging. The eye-brows are replaced by jet-black lines, and around them the eyes, lips, skin and hair are pale: "Die Gesichter hätten sich, ohne ihre rußigen Bindestriche, aufgelöst im hellen Grau all der vergangenen Abende". Due to the establishment of the Third Reich at that time, the sisters missed out on the latter part of their youth. Now they make themselves more attractive for their own sakes, as an act of defiance. It is not to please anybody else, and that is their tragedy; they no longer relate to the outside world of the present.

The decline that Marianne suggests they are resisting could therefore be either the decline of their youth, or the decline of society as they know it. The lines under their eyes are the last marks of self-respect that they cling to as they resist the new life-style that has been thrust upon them, and as they resist the ever onward march of time. Marianne remembers them as looking "als wäre ihnen soeben ein Unglück widerfahren, eine Strafe über sie verhängt worden." The image of the König sisters underlining their eyes is tragic, comparable to somebody long widowed never letting go of the wedding ring.

For Marianne, it is important to know which of the sisters applied the make-up. The significance lies in the

⁵⁷ Brigitte BURMEISTER, *Herbstfeste; Erzählungen*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1995

parallels between Claire and Johannes. If Johannes is like Claire because they both attempted to make a clean start in a new life, then Marianne cannot be unlike Minna in her decision to remain behind. Marianne guesses that it is Minna who made that last action of resistance, thereby acknowledging Minna as someone who holds on to hope, but also realising the tragedy that was this unfulfilled life.

In a letter dated October 1946, Claire laments "Wärest Du doch nur damals rüber gekommen..." and Marianne ponders this, wondering whether Minna should have followed her friend "anstatt bis an ihr Ende auf graue Wände zu blicken und sehr traurige Briefe zu schreiben". Neither Claire nor Minna seem to be at peace with the decisions that they made years earlier. Claire has everything: "mit Mann und Tochter und Haus und Hund und guter Ernährung in einem reichen Land, jenseits von Krieg und Kälte", but she is lonely: "*Ihr seid zwei und habt Euch gegenseitig*". Minna and Ella may have each other, but even so, Marianne remembers that Minna "schon tagelang abwesend war, nicht mehr sprach, auf dem kleinen Sofa saß und geradeaus starrte, in die vergilbten Gardinen" (p.141). Marianne's stream of consciousness then jumps back to the present day, showing us a parallel between her and Minna: "Also die Wohnungen ringsum schon leer, die Leute unterwegs nach USA und Kanada, ins sonnige Australien. Nur ich bin noch hier..." (p.132). Marianne is realising that she herself is in the same position that Minna was in six decades earlier, and must choose between cutting herself off from the past, like Claire and Johannes, and risking the loneliness of life in a foreign land, or clinging on to the past, like the König sisters, and never experiencing life in the present; unless she can find an equilibrium that allows her to accept the past that has given her her identity while she moves on in a changing society.

Marianne's search for this identity constitutes a large part of the novel. It is the motivation behind her conversations, actions and thoughts, both imaginary and actual. Christine Consentino speaks of this: "Die komplexen Übersschichtungen und Erzählschwierigkeiten der Ich-Sprecherin suggerieren vielmehr den Gedanken der Orientierungslosigkeit und Identitätssuche des Ostdeutschen schlechthin sowie die wechselseitigen Wahrnehmungsschwierigkeiten von Ost nach West."⁵⁸

In her introduction to *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, Margarete Mitscherlich indicates her solution to the problem of finding a balance between living in the past and cutting oneself off from the past:

Nur wer sich erinnert, sich nicht selber belügt, lebt in der Gegenwart, ist zu einem wirklichen Neubeginn fähig und nicht dazu verdammt, unabgeschlossene, weil verdrängte Vergangenheit zu verewigen.⁵⁹

Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich devoted a whole book to this topic in 1967 (*Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*). They saw the danger of the German people allowing themselves to believe that during the Third Reich they "nur unter dem Druck bössartiger Verfolger all das tun mußten, was [sie] taten" (*Trauern*, p.26). The problem in this was that "nur die passenden Bruchstücke der Vergangenheit zur Erinnerung zugelassen werden". After World War Two, this led to the following problem:

Ein Tabu ist entstanden, ein echtes Berührungstabu. Es ist verboten, die Anerkennung der gegenwärtigen Grenzen beider deutscher Staaten als ein Faktum zu diskutieren, von dem man zunächst einmal auszugehen hat. (*Trauern*, p.15)

⁵⁸ *German Review*, 71/3, Summer 1996

⁵⁹ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.10

The 'Berührungstabu' carries on into the next epoch, as is suggested by the title under which the discussion between East German Brigitte Burmeister and West German Margarete Mitscherlich is published. The two authors are "Zwei deutsche Seelen - einander fremd geworden". Without transferring a suggested cure from one society onto the next, both authors indicate that the East German past cannot be simply discarded.

Burmeister is not suggesting that the entire East German society needs to be analysed either piece by piece or as a generalised whole. She is, in fact, quite against such an idea: "ich wehre mich gegen eine Art der Kritik, die schon wieder kritiklos ist, weil sie in Bausch und Bogen alles für schlecht erklärt, was war. Und in diesem Zusammenhang ärgert mich auch, wenn eine ganze Gesellschaft sozusagen psychiatrisiert wird - allesamt deformiert, alles Insassen einer geschlossenen Anstalt." In *Norma*, this is no more apparent than in the cliché-like meeting of the tenants (pp.145-154). Neumann, Bärwald and the 'fremde Frau' together form the personification of what Brigitte Burmeister refers to in *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu* (p.49) as "eine Karikatur, die als solche ja auch etwas Reales trifft und verständlich ist als Ausdruck von Empörung, Verletztsein, angestautem Frust und dergleichen".

In *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, the Mitscherlichs work by the assumption that the West Germans did not grieve, and did not take time to consider the events of the Third Reich and the consequences of their actions. Brigitte Burmeister goes one step further in her novel, however, by not remaining with that generalisation. In the portrayal of the König sisters, a part of society is represented that did grieve for the past years and have never stopped grieving. Although a large part of post-World War II

Germany moved on without ever looking back, there is a fragment of society who did grieve, and of this portion some continued to do so, especially if the letters from Claire are actual documents, as Hans-Georg Soldat suggests.⁶⁰

In this light, Marianne searches for her past, wanting to understand it and to keep it alive in her memory so that she can make a smooth transition into the next phase of life, while still holding on to her identity that is intertwined with East German life. The past is quite literally unearthed by Marianne, as she seeks glimpses of what was by going through the material that other tenants have discarded. People throw away their past as they make a new start. Nowhere has this been more obvious than in East Germany, where furniture, appliances, carpets and even Trabant cars were left on the side of the road, rejected by their owners as Western products became available. For Marianne, however, it is not so much the furniture as the discarded letters that are of interest, and she looks for them in the rubbish containers that are found in a courtyard of the house.

In summary, German life as far back as the years prior to World War One is represented by the König family and the family friend, Claire. Through the American postcards and letters from Claire to Minna König, we learn how these people came to terms with, or did not come to terms with, each era of Germany as it was replaced by the next. The parallels between Claire and Johannes and between Minna and Marianne bring to the reader's attention that Marianne and Johannes now face the same choices that the others made decades ago. Will they make the same mistakes, or will

⁶⁰ Hans-Georg SOLDAT, 'Die Wende in Deutschland im Spiegel der Zeitgenössischen deutschen Literatur', *German Life and Letters* 2, 4/1997, p.150

they learn from the past? It seems that by growing a new identity, Johannes has sown the same seeds as Claire, and he is therefore likely also to reap the consequences that Claire gleaned, yearning for her past identity, hoping to retrieve it. At present, he would reject this idea, but Burmeister shows through Claire that Johannes may, like her, yearn for his past identity at some future stage, only to discover, again like Claire, that he cannot regain it. The letters are Claire reaching back to that identity. As Marianne clings to her identity, she needs to learn from Minna's mistake and allow that identity to further develop, as social and political changes take place.

CHAPTER THREE - EAST GERMANY'S STASI-PAST

A very particular chapter of the past of the GDR is opened with the character of Margarete Bauer. In dealing with the question of guilt and its consequences in relation to the shady dealings of the Stasi, Brigitte Burmeister moves away from generalisations and collective guilt, ideas prominent at the time the novel was written, and presents an individual case. In doing this, she is asking the reader to resist the temptation to proclaim a verdict without knowing each separate story. The facts do not always line up with the rumours.

Margarete Bauer is a past resident of the Mietshaus whose apartment has more recently been vacated. From what we are told of this woman, we can deduce that she has also had trouble adjusting to a new lifestyle. As Frau Schwarz and Marianne reminisce, she is brought back to life in their memories. Gretel, as Frau Schwarz refers to her (p.36), used to live in the same section of the tenement block as these two ladies, then later moved into an apartment in the front of the building. She was a single mother providing for a growing son, a lanky youth by the name of Norbert. She would see him to school and then be at work herself by eight in the morning, six days a week:

“...auch sonnabends, weil der obersten Schulherrin, dieser grauenvollen Ziege, sagte sie, selbst durch ausnahmsweise energisches Elternbegehren eine Umstellung des eingefahrenen Zeitplans nicht abzurufen war.” (p.39)

This conversation that Marianne recalls having with Margarete is very revealing. It shows the deceased to have been a hard worker (she completed an eight and three quarter hour day and then came home to begin with more work, we are told in the next sentence). She obviously

worked more than the average East German woman, of whom only a small minority chose to stay at home. Raising a child by herself meant sacrificing her own social life. She begrudged the influence of the state on her life, however, as we see by the reference to Erich Honecker's wife, Margot. Margot Honecker was the Minister of Education for some time in the GDR and was often referred to as 'die Hexe Margot' by the population at large, although this was the sort of comment that one reserved to circles of trusted friends, for fear of it being reported to the Stasi. Brigitte Burmeister says of Margot Honecker: "Ich fand Margot tatsächlich grauenvoll, noch engstirniger und dadurch wahrscheinlich böartiger als der Erich".⁶¹ Margarete's impatience with the GRD is further emphasised when she speaks, through Marianne's stream of consciousness, of their "Dreibuchstabenland" as being "kleinkariert" (p.45).

In this conversation, Margarete was telling Marianne of her dream to one day get away from the East German tenement block and the lifestyle that it envelops: "...denn das hier sei doch kein Leben." (p.45) The single mother had kept at the housing office officials until they finally removed her from the list of people seeking apartments. Her desires were too high for a country where more than two and a half rooms was too much for a single mother with a child to expect. To be faced with living in the same apartment until she retired was hard for Margarete ("Wie sie auch die Jahre bis zur Rente an derselben Stelle festsitzen werde, vielleicht mal eine neue Schreibmaschine, ein neuer Kollege, ein neuer Wandanstrich, alles andere Wiederholung, daran dürfe sie gar nicht denken"). What seemed to keep her going was the hope that she would one day be able to do something different, "irgendwas ganz

⁶¹ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.54

Verrücktes", once Norbert, the son, is able to stand on his own feet. She considers a move to Jamaica: "es läge immerhin auf demselben Planeten wie unser kleinkariertes Dreibuchstabenland". Marianne believed that her friend would do just that, and is surprised that Margarete does not use the opportunity once the world is open to them.

The changes that the reunification brings with it were more than Margarete bargained for, however. She lost her job and her efforts to find a new one were no doubt hampered by the fact that so many other people were in the same situation. Her weaknesses in the field of budgeting and of making do without things made paying the bills all the more difficult. When she visits Frau Schwarz for what turns out to be that last time, she brings Apfelkuchen from Dörner with her and tells her friend:

"die Stücke [Apfelkuchen] sind jetzt doppelt so groß wie früher, aber auch dreimal so teuer...und alles andere erst, [Frau Schwarz] könne froh sein, daß [sie] schon lange in Rente sei und das meiste nicht mehr so mitkriege" (p.36).

On top of this, the relationship that she had with a married man for many years does not survive the changes of the time, and Norbert moves away from home ("der Mutter entflohen war, sagte das Gerücht", p.42). By putting the pieces together, it is possible to imagine a woman who has held tightly to her son, needing him to stay at home so that she has a sense of purpose in life (providing for him), and so that she can enjoy her dreams with the hope that they are, at a later time, possible. Now that the door is open for Margarete to move out into the world, she does not have the finances to do so. Marianne thinks of Margarete as "ein weiteres Opfer unserer unblutigen Revolution", and of the reunification she thinks: "nein, so hatten wir uns die Erneuerung nicht vorgestellt". Statements such as these, however, are so often repeated in

the 'neuen Bundesländer', that they have become clichés. The reader has to become aware of the irony that Burmeister is using here as she exposes them as 'Ossi-lamentations'.

There is another hurdle that Margarete faced, however: "Und im Nachbarhaus, wo Norma wohnt, hatte man das Wesen durchschaut, sein lange gehütetes Geheimnis aus zwei Buchstaben aufgedeckt" (p.43). Margarete is rumoured to be an 'IM', an *Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter* for the Stasi.

In his Buch *Die Stasi-Akten*,⁶² Joachim Gauck speaks of "Das unheimliche Erbe der DDR". If they were to be stood side by side, the Stasi files would form a line of over 180 kilometres in length. To properly appreciate the volume of that, one must also know that each metre of files contains up to 10,000 pieces of paper reporting the actions of East German citizens. The information was gathered by Stasi-Officers from people that had contact with the person of interest. This could be a colleague, a friend or even a family member. The names and covernames of these *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* were also recorded, names such as 'Margarete Bauer'. Needless to say, the question of what to do with the carefully documented information was responded to with differing opinions. The two main propositions were 'Schlußstrich'; to bury the files under layers of concrete, or 'Aufarbeitung'; to work through them, allowing some (restricted) access to the public. They are the same two main choices that Brigitte Burmeister refers to of how to deal with the past.

The Stasi itself began with the 'Schlußstrich' option during the revolutionary weeks of autumn 1989. They systematically burned many files. It did not take long,

⁶² GAUCK, Joachim, *Die Stasi-Akten - Das unheimliche Erbe der DDR*, Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1991

however, for not only West German politicians but also persons of integrity from East German (who were sometimes themselves victims of the Stasi-snoopers) to call a stop to this. An office was authorised by the federal government and under the leadership of Joachim Gauck, one thousand people were employed with the task of organising and guarding the files. This task is particularly complicated because of ethical rights of the victims often collide with the strong principles of the law of the land. They also come up against the resistance because, due to the extent of the spying that is documented, many people lack the courage needed to expose the activities of the past.

After Marianne has shared the news of Margarete's suicide with Frau Schwarz and the elderly lady has speechlessly shuffled back to her apartment, Marianne feels furious that such a tragedy should be allowed to occur: "Mich packte Wut" (p.44). Some people escape the problems of the time by committing suicide, others, like Johannes, escape by becoming Westerners and they expect those who remain behind to do the same: "es stand ja jedem frei". Marianne seems to ridicule that last statement. Margarete did not find the freedom to travel away: "Und in den frischen Graben hier die Opfer, Täter, Opfertäter, alle nicht mehr zu vernehmen" (p.44). Burmeister touches here on an important question; how can one define who is a victim and who a perpetrator? Joachim Gauck puts it thus: "Die Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter der Stasi können nicht pauschal zu Tätern abgestempelt werden... denn [viele haben] nur aufgrund besonderer Druck- und Krisensituationen ihre Unterschrift gegeben" (*Die Stasi-Akten*, p.28). Brigitte Burmeister also speaks of the problem, while pointing out that she herself could be considered an *IM*. About reports that she had to write after attending any seminars in West Germany she writes:

“Dabei war mir klar, daß eine oder mehrere Kopien [of the reports] an die Stasi gingen. Insofern war ich eine Informantin der Stasi, und so gesehen hat auch jeder Lehrer, der Beurteilungen schrieb, jeder Betriebsleiter etc. die Stasi informiert.”⁶³

This comment from the author is of particular interest when seen in the context of the narrator's self-accusation. Marianne's story about the Gérard Philipe look-alike (the Stasi-officer in her fabricated biography) may not be true, but she realises that there were many reasons why the Stasi could have had a file of someone's reports. Marianne comments to herself: “die Akten lügen nicht, warum sollten sie” (p.43), and her sarcasm is almost audible. Valuable as they are for dealing with the past, there are many reasons why the Akten could lie. Some people were pressured into such service by the use of subtle threats: the Stasi could create problems not just for the person who turned down an offer to report on someone, but also for their immediate family. Many people who have been accused by the files of spying testify that they were approached by the Stasi but that they never agreed to comply. There are others who may have agreed for one reason or another, but who never revealed anything that could be harmful to the person they must spy on. Marianne later reports that she herself once fell in love with a Stasi-Officer, not realising his only interest in her was the information that she passed on to him. Although this story is partly inspired by her feeling of dissociation in West Germany and partly by the wine at Johannes' party (“Anfangs hatte mich der Wein umnebelt, dann eine Weile inspiriert”, p.241), it shows how she is able to empathise with Margarete.

As she ponders Margarete's death, Marianne also thinks about their earlier friendship. She did not need to

⁶³ Brigitte BURMEISTER, *Wir haben eine Berührungstabus*, p.40

advertise or fight for the friendship, it was simply offered to her. Also, she “[mußte sich] nicht beunruhigen, über einen einseitige Offenheit, für die es so wenig ersichtlichen Grund gab.” (p.39) The two women were the same age, they loved the same novels, hoarded when possible “Pflaumenmus und Erdbeermark”, were scared of Neumann, were without convictions for any particular political party, had once held Gérard Philipe as a god, and suffered heavily from wanderlust in spring. Marianne’s own story of betrayal to the Stasi begins with the appearance at her door of a man who looks like Gérard Philipe (p.236).

Marianne feels kindred to Margarete, and she herself admits that her impulse to defend Margarete and to not believe the worst of her stems partly from the fact that she herself feels threatened by the rumours. This is not an admission that her later story is true, nor that it could be true, but a recognition that once such a rumour is started, no evidence is needed to convict the person involved in the eyes of their neighbours (“weil ich mich selbst bedroht fühlte durch Normas Bereitwilligkeit, einem Gerücht zu glauben”, p.60).

Marianne and Norma argue about this topic, and do not speak to each other for three days afterwards, so strong is the conviction of each. Norma, whose name is so closely linked to ‘Normannenstraße’, where the main Stasi archives are situated, views informing and the Stasi system as abhorrent and believes “wer da die Fronten verwischte, stellte sich auf die falsche Seite, schützte die Täter und verfolgte die Opfer” (p.58). Marianne’s response: “O Gott, Norma, die Zeitung lese ich selbst”. She realises their argument, their opinions, are not new, only the reasons for using them (p.59). Marianne argues for Margarete maybe because Margarete can no longer defend herself, maybe because she

is convinced of Margarete's innocence, but most likely because she does not want her view of Margarete shattered (p.59). As the two argue one way and the other, words such as "gut und böse, Wahrheit, Lüge, Mut, Feigheit, Täter, Opfer, Schuld und Sühne" become "alles hohle Begriffe" (p.60). Brigitte Burmeister is showing us how hard it is to draw a line between right and wrong when it comes to the Stasi files.

It is surely no coincidence that the *IM* in Brigitte Burmeister's book bears the name Margarete Bauer. East Germany was known as a 'Abeiter- und Bauernstaat', so with the surname 'Bauer', Margarete is representative of much of the East German population. As for the name 'Margarete', Brigitte Burmeister was no doubt aware that her colleague Christa Wolf was active as an informant for the Stasi in 1960/61, and that her code name was Margarete. When evidence was produced early in 1993 to show that Christa Wolf had written reports for the Stasi, the media took advantage of the scandal, but omitted to take account of exactly when she was involved with the Stasi or the nature of the information that she provided to them. Christa Wolf counteracted this slur on her reputation by publishing her entire Stasi file in the volume *Akteneinsicht*⁶⁴. She had already written the *Erzählung Was Bleibt* in 1990; a piece of work that describes a day in which the autobiographical narrator is under the surveillance of the Stasi. Although it was not wholly uncommon to be both spy and spied on simultaneously, the change from *Täter* to *Opfer* is perhaps best summed up in this quote by Christa Wolf herself:

Ich habe zum Beispiel spätestens 1965 aufgehört, mich mit der DDR so wie sie war, zu identifizieren. 1965, das war bei jenem berühmten elften Plenum des ZK der SED, habe ich als einzige gesprochen gegen die

⁶⁴ Hermann VINKE (ed), *Akteneinsicht Christa Wolf: Zerrspiegel und Dialog*, Hamburg: 1993

Anwürfe gegen Kollegen und gegen die Maßnahmen, die damals die Kultur, den Film vor allem zerstört haben oder zerstören sollten. Da war mir klar, daß etwas absolut falsch lief.⁶⁵

Marianne's friendship with Margarete Bauer points towards an affinity of Burmeister's for Christa Wolf, of whom she speaks in the interview with Margarete Mitscherlich: "ich kann den Schmerz glauben und kann es deshalb, weil so viel Aufrichtigkeit in [Christa Wolfs] Texten ist, und ich finde es absolut schäbig, eine Art stalinistisches Monster zu machen aus einer Frau, die solche Bücher geschrieben hat."⁶⁶ Brigitte Burmeister realises that she is also eligible for hurtful rumours about Stasi involvement, as rumours have the same effect, regardless of the reality of the facts.

Such a reference to Christa Wolf would further strengthen the links already established in the parallels of the plot of Brigitte Burmeister's *Unter dem Namen Norma* and Christa Wolf's *Divided Heaven* (Beth Alldred refers to this in her article in *German Life and Letters*) and both are evidence of the nexus between the ideals of the two authors. In both novels, the female protagonists visit their partners, who have chosen to move to the West, but then the women return to the East, reluctant to take on a capitalistic life-style at the expense of the memories or the possibilities of the East. Both protagonists are intellectuals who spend some time working in a factory, something encouraged under Communism with the purpose of ensuring that the intellectual can relate to the worker. Brigitte Burmeister also worked for a year in a factory, as she tells Margarete Mitscherlich: "Ich habe nach dem Abitur ein Jahr in einer Maschinenfabrik gearbeitet".⁶⁷ The

⁶⁵ *Tagesspiegel*, 30 April, 1996

⁶⁶ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.58

⁶⁷ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.33

opening sentence of Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* could also be transferred to *Norma*: "Die Vergangenheit ist nicht tot; es ist nicht einmal vergangen. Wir trennen es von uns ab und stellen uns fremd" (Berlin, Weimar: 1976).

To summarise, through the character Margarete Bauer, Brigitte Burmeister deals with a chapter of the German Democratic Republic that was the centre of much public debate at the time that *Norma* was written, that is, the Stasi past. As Beth Alldred points out,⁶⁸ the author's presentation runs contrary to established media portrayals of the issue and questions the validity of negative, stereotypical images of Stasi agents. There is not necessarily any truth in the fact that Margarete Bauer was a Stasi agent, just as Marianne's own Stasi story does not contain facts, yet in both instances, the stories are readily believed, as such stories have become commonplace in the media. To Brigitte Burmeister, keeping alive the memories of the past involves not just stopping the memories from disappearing, but also stopping them from expanding and no longer resembling the events that they represent.

⁶⁸ *German Life and Letters*, 50:2, April 1997, p.178

CHAPTER FOUR - THE FANTASY ELEMENT

The Mietshaus is inhabited not only by real, flesh and blood people, but also by characters who are born in the imagination of the actual tenants. The narrator, Marianne, shows an ability to fantasise in such a way that she is able to create whole histories for her fictional friends. She is often visited by her imaginary daughter, and is able to tell an elaborate story about her own fictional past at the party in the West. And then there is Norma. The opposing views of different critics I mentioned earlier, and in this chapter I intend to look at the significance of Marianne's active imagination by exploring the characters that she creates. What is their role in her life, and what significance do they have in the novel? I will study the controversial figure of Norma in more detail, so as to establish that she too is, indeed, an *Erfindung* of Marianne's, although this is not as easily proven as Emilia's non-existence.

That Marianne converses with imaginary friends is not widely acknowledged, but those critics who have done a more detailed study of the book (Susanne Ledanff, Thomas Kraft) agree that Emilia, the *Kopfgeburt* (p.117), is fictional. Volker Wehdeking, Wolfgang Emmerich and Detlef Kuhlbrodt all state, as I mentioned earlier, that Marianne returns to Berlin, where she can stay with her daughter, but this is obviously not the case, as before Johannes left, Marianne lived, in her own words, "mit Mann ohne Kind" (p.39). There are further pointers that Emilia is not visible on page 118ff, where Marianne admits that she does not know the 'Geburtsgeschichte' of Emilia, because "alles ganz leicht und schnell und sozusagen hinter meinem Rücken geschehen war, ohne die Anzeichen des Bedeutsamen, so daß ich nicht einmal das Datum angeben konnte". The closest

Marianne can come to putting a date on Emilia's 'birth' is that it must have occurred before the time that she remembers the child appearing between two colleagues at a meeting. Here we see that the colleagues must ask Marianne who appeared to her in the meeting (Marianne had been motioning to Emilia). "An Geistesabwesenheit in Versammlungen waren wir gewöhnt", Marianne explains to her readers (p.119). Marianne does not, however, seem to be able to consciously influence the timing of these 'appearances'.

The choice of words that Marianne uses when talking about Emilia is also an indication that the child does not exist in the factual world. There are verbs such as "erscheinen", as in "Ihre Nacktheit erschien mir jetzt so verletzlich vor den Steinmassen des Gebäudes" (p.122), and "Emilia..., die seit der Nacht zum achtzehnten Juni nicht mehr erschienen war" (p.224), which have other connotations, in this case, the connection with the word "Erscheinung". Emilia's nakedness, her appearance, is just an apparition of Marianne's. Adjectives are also used in this way. In the final paragraph of the novel, Marianne describes how Emilia speaks "mit ihrer unmöglichen Stimme". Again, the word is ambiguous, meaning not only unusual, but also impossible. Earlier, Marianne describes Emilia's voice as "piepsig und heiser" (p.116), a rather unlikely combination. At the river and at the factory, Marianne describes Emilia as "schimmernd", gleaming, but also shimmering, like a mirage in a desert. On the train, Marianne hears one sentence from Emilia "aus einiger Entfernung", a phrase that suggests an inner distance, from a voice that is not from this physical sphere of being.

Emilia sits "auf der Armlehne meines [Marianne's] Sitzes, die langen Beine in den Gang gestreckt" (p.177) when she is

not jumping up and running around on the train. This does not disturb the other passengers, however: "und ihr häufiges Aufspringen, Herumlaufen niemandem auffiel außer mir. Emilia hatte ich für mich allein" (p.178). Also on the train, Marianne pictures herself arriving back at her apartment in the tenement building, "wo einer ihrer [Normas] gelben Klebezettel mich willkommen heißt" (p.186). "Mich" is singular, in contrast to the plural "Wir haben die Stadt erreicht" that begins that chapter. The "wir" may refer to Marianne and Emilia, or simply the trainload of people, but the singular "mich" is distinct in its description of just one person arriving home. Emilia is not with her. She does not exist. That is why her eyes are described as "große dunkle Augen, blank, fast etwas glasisg" (p.118). Eyes are often described as the windows to the soul, but Emilia has no soul. Marianne sees her "knapp über dem Fluß" (p.117), not just on the other side of the river, but above the river, hovering like a apparition. Emilia lives only in Marianne's imagination.

Why does Marianne create an imaginary daughter? The most obvious answer to this question is that she and Johannes were not able to have children, and this fictive daughter is an outlet for her maternal instincts. Emilia's intense interest in the contents of her abdomen for a period of time backs up this idea. Marianne would have done an intense study on "Eier, Stöcke, Leiter und die zum Gebären bestimmte Mutter in ihr" (p.117) when she discovered that she was not falling pregnant. Working against the maternal theory, however, is the fact that Emilia is already an adolescent when Marianne first remembers her ("meine halbwüchsige Tochter, schimmernd vor Neuheit", p.118). Surely a woman longing for a child would create first an imaginary baby that she can, in her imagination, nurse and

show off to friends. But Emilia is dressed "in einem dunkelgrünen Seidenkleid" rather than pink frills.

Also opposing the idea that Emilia substitutes the child that Marianne could never have is the fact that Emilia first appeared at the factory. The year that Marianne spent there was between finishing school and commencing university; a time in which it is unlikely that she was already married, and less unlikely that she had discovered she could not fall pregnant, unless it was due to an earlier sickness or a botched abortion. Again, because Emilia appeared already at this time, she cannot be the image of the child aborted in the Stasi-story, if that story were true.

If maternal instincts are not the sole reason for Emilia's "Kopfgeburt", what other purpose does Emilia have in Marianne's life? The factory appearance is Emilia's first appearance significant enough for Marianne to set her apart from other imaginary figures, and this is a clue. Marianne is university material, so factory work and its related meetings are unlikely to be stimulating enough for her. She is the only one at that time who was not going to be working there until retirement (she worked there "ohne zunächst zu wissen, für wie lange, aber gewiß, daß es nicht lebenslänglich sein würde wie bei den anderen, die nie eine Universität von innen sähen", pp.90/91). It is Johannes that speaks of the "unsichtbaren Mauern" between those more intellectually minded than others (p.94), and although Marianne and Norma show later that these mental walls need be no more permanent than the Berlin Wall, it is still true that Marianne would have been bored with monotonous work.

Emilia's appearance at the factory gave Marianne someone to wave at during "Rechenschaftsberichte", therefore, but more

than that, a daughter is a part of oneself. In a job where Marianne may have felt like one of the machines that she was working alongside, a daughter gave her an identity and established her individuality. Having a daughter would also identify her as a family.

The importance of family ties is also part of the reason for Emilia's appearances on 17 June and 14 July. On the first of these days, Marianne has been speaking to Johannes over the phone, and argues with him just before the credit on her phonecard runs out. She says something using "genau der Ton, die Art, die Johannes nicht ausstehen konnte", and then runs out of time to apologise and to reassure him that she loves him. The distance between East and West is too wide for proper communication. Instead of going back to the apartment to sleep, she leaves the telephone booth and follows the path that the König sisters used to walk. It is here that Emilia reappears, dancing naked along the opposite riverbank. The child has a mind of her own, and argues with Marianne just as Norma does, but all the same, she is someone to whom Marianne belongs, and who belongs to Marianne.

Her appearance in the second half of the book is again after Marianne has argued with Johannes and has parted from him. This time the argument is over the Stasi-story that she tells a guest at Johannes' party, and the parting is more permanent. She leaves her husband's West German house early in the morning and is on her way back to Berlin when Emilia appears on the train at Frankfurt-Louisa. Again, the child does as she pleases and she and Marianne argue about "Wissen, Gewißheit, Beweise", but all the same, there is a sense of each belonging in some way to the other. Emilia seems to appear to Marianne at times of extreme loneliness, when she is apart from Johannes.

Marianne's desire for family relationships may also be behind the detailed history that we are told about the fictive Norma. Norma's Oma Edith becomes Marianne's grandmother in the Stasi-story, both times the "große Liebe aus einem frühen Abschnitt" (pp.193 & 227). Marianne imagines a daughter for herself, and she also imagines daughters for Norma. Together with Norma and her two daughters, Ines and Sandra, Marianne picnics in the country. "Jetzt", Sandra comments to Marianne, "sind wir eine moderne Familie" (p.201). Marianne is able to fill the void created by the move of Johannes to the West by creating a new family to which she can feel a part.

Although Emilia substitutes for family when things go wrong between Marianne and Johannes, it is interesting that she does not appear at the tenement block, itself. The courtyard is, according to Marianne, "kein Ort für sie" (p.152). The tenement block is a monument of German history to Marianne at this point in the novel, and Emilia, a member of the up and coming generation, does not belong there, as Marianne sees it. Emilia represents that future, and it is a future that Marianne is not yet sure of. On the train-journey back from the West, Emilia criticises Marianne's lack of interest in people of today (her neighbour with the newspaper, as compared to her interest in "die Ehemaligen", pp.180ff). Emilia tells Marianne: "Dir ist nicht zu helfen" (p.183). It is significant, therefore, that by the final chapter, Marianne can stand in the courtyard and wish, "daß zuguterletzt Emilia käme...und...verkünden würde, anscheinend sei mir doch noch zu helfen" (p.286). She will hear "kein Schleifen morgen", for the ghosts of the past have been laid to rest. The tenement block has taken on a new role; it is not only a museum of the past, but also an oracle of the future.

“Verkünden” means not only ‘to announce’, but also ‘to prophecy’, just as “Zuguterletzt” means ‘finally’, but it also implies a happy ending. Between the train journey from the West with Emilia and the walk back from the pub with Norma, a vision for the future has been born in Marianne.

The key to Marianne’s new hope for the future is to be found in the narrator’s second fictitious friend, Norma. Unlike Emilia, Norma does spend time in the tenement block; Marianne likes to imagine that her friend has spent time there listening to records while she, the tenant, is in the West, it is interesting that Norma does not have an apartment in the tenement block, but lives next door. Norma is a stable factor in a world that is turning upside down. She first appears when Marianne and Johannes are on their way to join the celebrations at the wall on the night of November 9, 1989 (“Ich dachte daran, ...wie wir zum Säulentor liefen, Johannes und ich, und plötzlich eine Frau mit uns” p.23). Later, she makes the observations about Johannes’ change in character that Marianne does not want to admit (“er gehörte doch längst nach drüben...”, p.114), as though Norma is that part of Marianne, which she does not want to acknowledge openly. Norma represents the thoughts that Marianne does not want to think about yet, but which she comes around to as the novel draws to a close. She is a support to Marianne when the latter leaves Johannes and arrives back at the tenement block unsure of the next move (“ich zog [Norma] zu mir, hielt sie unarmt und versuchte, etwas zu sagen”, p.147). As Marianne’s ‘zweites Ich’, Norma is assertive and outgoing; something that Marianne is learning that she must be if she is to move actively into the new era of Germany. To be passive means to accept all changes as changes for the better,

which means dismissing all elements of the past as negative influences.

Passages that suggest Norma's fictitious nature include Marianne's aforementioned comment to her husband that "weil die unsichtbaren Mauern [in der DDR] das Wesentliche waren, brauchten wir über Erscheinungen wie Norma nicht zu reden" (p.95). Like with Emilia, the description of the eyes and voice are an indication of fictitiousness: "wenn ich...vor ihnen herumfuchtele, kein Reflex der Pupillen" (p.189); "ihre Stimme, die etwas zu hoch und manchmal klirrend von dem gehüteten Bild absprang, ...als unnatürliches Tönen" (p.190). Also, Norma and Marianne both have grandmothers by the name of Edith Barsig (pp.193 and 227). Marianne and Norma want to fight "Seite an Seite durch den Fragebogen, die Steuererklärung, den Rentenbescheid" (p.280). They want to enjoy "das Recht, [sich] einen Arbeitsplatz zu teilen" (p.280). Death will not separate them, for they will be "im selben Grab eingeschlossen" (p.280).

Although Norma is a figment of Marianne's imagination, her personality is not entirely fictive. As Marianne's 'zweites Ich', Norma is to a certain extent the projection of Marianne's own character. Arguments with Norma show the inner conflict that Marianne faces, along with many other deep thinking East Germans, as she questions how social issues raised by such things as the Stasi-files should be dealt with and as she is confronted with changing attitudes in close friends such as her husband. In the same way, the 'Freundschaftsbund' that concludes the novel is not only a symbolic example of how East and West can come together if each side learns to respect the other ("Freundschaft ist nicht das schlechteste Art, mitzuwirken an der gesellschaftlichen Vereinigung, diesem Knäuel aus Hoffnungen, Mängeln und Mißverständnissen", p.283), but it

is a positive image of the narrator ready to face the future, stable in her belief in herself. What had been split into two personalities joins together to become one: "Denken wir daran, daß beim Go-Spiel ein Gebiet nur lebendig bleibt, wenn man dafür gesorgt hat, daß zumindest zwei freie Räume existieren, die Spezialisten nennen das offene Augen" (p.282/3).

In the days following the fall of the Berlin wall, Marianne and Norma discover that they have many things in common (p.29ff). They meet at a cafe, just on the Western side of where the old border crossing once stood. Their conversation is littered with phrases such as: "ich auch!" and "mir ging es genauso", and they discover they had the same image of what this cafe looked like from the West. In Marianne's retelling, the two voices blend together in the one sentence: "jedenfalls sehe ich sie nicht mehr, ich auch nicht." They have the occasional disagreement (Norma finds the coffee-coloured walls "wohltuend warm" and Marianne sees them as "abstoßend düster"), but generally they are of the same mind. Less than two and a half years ago, Johannes arrived home not from the West, but from a meeting organising the first and last free elections of East Germany. Marianne thinks then of East Berlin "als etwas Leichtes, seit langem da und mit guten Aussichten, uns zu überdauern" (p.32). All is still well with the world at this point, without conflict.

Conflict with Johannes and with herself is not far off, however. In the previous chapter, I looked at the opposing views of Norma and Marianne on the subject of Stasi-informers and the degree of their guilt. Norma retells the rumour about Margarete as though it were proven truth, and this annoys Marianne, who does not want to believe the worst of her friend, and who feels threatened by people's

willingness to believe everything that they hear. Marianne wants to defend Margarete, and Norma wants to prosecute her. The fact that it is Norma who wants informers to be brought out into the open seems at first a paradox, as it is under the name Norma that Marianne snitches in her own alleged Stasi past. Would she not want the files to be sealed under layers of concrete? That Stasi past is not true, however, and it is the part of Marianne that she projects onto Norma that knows the truth about how widespread the informing was. The side of her portrayed in the character Marianne would prefer to remain ignorant of the truth. Her life is a 'Lebenslüge' in which her view of reality is distorted.

It is "die fremde Frau", a woman at the meeting in the courtyard who has the hair and voice of Norma, who provokes Marianne into actively defending those subject to accusing rumours. The 'fremde Frau' recognises that "weglaufen war noch nie die richtige Lösung" (p.148) and summarises why this small gathering has come together, while at the same time summarising what M. & A. Mitscherlich postulate in *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*:

Nicht richten wollen wir, sondern die Vergangenheit bewältigen, das heißt Erinnerungsarbeit leisten, die eigene Geschichte aufarbeiten, und dazu gehört die Einsicht in Irrtümer, in schuldhaftes Verhalten, bei jedem von uns (*Norma*, 149).

We know from *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu* (as quoted p.45 above) that Brigitte Burmeister is against the "Psychiatisierung eines ganzen Volkes". This is emphasised also in *Gute Nacht, Du Schöne*: "Für mich beginnen die Schwierigkeiten mit dem scheinbar verständlichen Wort "aufarbeiten"..." Knowing Brigitte Burmeister's opinion when "ein Rezensent die DDR-Schriftsteller, en bloc, auffordert, nun endlich

“Trauerarbeit zu leisten”⁷⁰, the gathering of the tenants in order ‘Erinnerungsarbeit zu leisten’ and ‘die Vergangenheit zu bewältigen’ can only be read as irony. Just as Brigitte Burmeister encourages the individual to neither forget the past (Johannes), nor to live in the past (Minna König), so it is with society as a whole.

Marianne mistakenly assumes that the group have dragged Herr Bärwald to the gathering against his will, when in fact it was he that organised it. Believing that the elderly gentleman is being used as a scapegoat, Marianne comes to his defence, openly showing her commitment to “Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit” (p.150). It is not so much that she is arguing with the group gathered in the courtyard however, as that she is completing the argument that she is having with Norma. This is why she hears the voice of Norma when the ‘fremde Frau’ speaks. Marianne has to prove herself to Norma:

meine Stimme schallt aus dem Hof, auf die Straße, bis ins Nebenhaus, hör dir das an, Norma, du wolltest es nicht glauben, ich setze mich ein für Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit.

Although this outburst is ill-timed, it is a step along the right path for Marianne. She is learning to stand up for what she believes in.

As she ponders the conversation with the ‘fremden Frau’, Marianne comes to accept that Norma’s hesitation and answer during their argument three days ago was not wrong. This pleases her as it means there is a future for their friendship (p.154). She has learned to accept Norma’s view as valid. The ‘fremde Frau’ in the meantime has become just that - an unknown woman. Her hair lies flatter on her head than earlier on, and her voice is different (p.154).

⁷⁰ Both quotes: Brigitte BURMEISTER, *Gute Nacht, Du Schöne*, p.57

She no longer seems like Norma; Marianne no longer fights with herself.

The hair that adorns the head of Marianne's fantasy friend is in itself unusual. The "knisternde, krause, kastanienbraune Mähne" (p.57) fascinates Marianne. She recalls the first time she stroked Norma's hair, running her hand through it as though her fingers were a comb. It is a very erotic picture for an imaginary friend. Norma is Marianne's emotional side; she acts by feelings rather than intellect ("Die übrigens keine Intellektuelle ist", p.95). Norma understands the need for emotional intimacy. The anagram of Norma/Roman (novel) reflects the inventive side of Norma's personality: the pleasure she finds in creating biographies from the observations that she makes of strangers. Marianne admires parts of Norma's personality: "warum machte ich es nicht wie Norma? Wildfremde Menschen sprach sie an." (p.93) In a time of life when many women need to reassert themselves and need to be reassured that they have value, Marianne's husband has chosen his career above her needs. These are 'Wechseljahre' in two different senses for Marianne.

In Marianne's journal of the events that took place within the first two years of the *Wende*, she records Johannes' move to Mannheim, her own increasing involvement with Norma and Norma's confidence that Johannes will not return. When Johannes leaves, he indicates that later they can move all their belongings to the new house in the West. Marianne refuses to accept the final move West as inevitable, however, reminding him that that will only be the case "wenn du die Probezeit schaffst" (p.200). He returns every second weekend, and they spend most of the time fighting. Between times she rebuilds the hope that he will eventually return permanently to her, but these hopes are then dashed

again by the next arrival and departure of her husband, "dem die Arbeit wichtiger war als ich" (p.201). For Norma, however "stand fest, daß er in Mannheim bleiben würde". Just a year after the fall of the Berlin wall, Norma could see that Marianne would have to make a choice between her "Glückansprüchen und einem dauerhaften Zusammenleben mit Johannes" (p.202). Truths that Marianne does not want to believe are projected onto Norma, the side of Marianne who is ready to see things in their true light. In this way, she can pretend her relationship with Johannes is going well, and can avoid thinking about what the future will bring.

It is Norma who sums up why Marianne told the story of a Stasi-past to a guest at Johannes' party. Johannes believes that amongst the lies, the core of the story is true, that Marianne was actually an informer at some stage in East Germany. ("Im Kern steckt die Wahrheit, die ich nie erfahren sollte. Denn was du Corinna erzählt hast, ist deine Geschichte. Du warst IM", p.23) Walter Hink speaks of "Ressentiment" in his article "Glasierete Gesichter" (FAZ 4.10.1994). He is not the only critic to understand the fabrication to stem from the author's underlying resentment of the fast-moving reunification of Germany. The whole novel, however, can be seen as Brigitte Burmeister's response to reunification, and I feel that the irony so prominent throughout the book is no less evident here. Walter Hick himself follows his thoughts of "eines Ressentiments..., das nicht ohne Ursachen ist" with the comment: "Nichts bleibt in der Optik diese Romans so einfach und so eindeutig, wie es zunächst erscheint"

To someone such as Norma, who can imagine the pressure at a gathering of West Germans "für die der Osten bevölkert ist von Stereotypen" (p.252), the real explanation for

Marianne's behaviour is easier to understand. As Marianne finishes her explanation of what happened in West Germany, Norma remains silent, staring intently at the floor. When prompted, she finally raises her head and says: "Horror vacui" (p.254) - the fear of the void. She is alluding to the theory that every vacuum is under pressure to be filled. In relation to the recent experience of Marianne, the vacuum is the lack of knowledge that the West Germans have of East Germany and those that lived there. Stereotypes are built up as the West Germans try to fill this void with their preconceived ideas:

Na ja, sagte [Norma] mit dem Rücken zu [Marianne], das erträgt der Mensch eben nicht, eine Handlung ohne erkennbaren Grund. Da muß er etwas an die leere Stelle setzen, ist doch verständlich... (p.255)

A vacuum is also to be found in the East Germans, whose society was pulled away from under their feet. Brigitte Burmeister refers to this in *Berührungstabu*:

Ich sehe es so, daß die alte Gesellschaft...in dem Maße, wie sie zusammenbrach, auch all das, was sie an Schutz und Sicherheit und Orientierung geboten, mit sich gerissen hat. Da ist ein Vakuum entstanden..."

By following through Marianne's retelling of the conversation that evening, we can see how it was that the story occurred. She had been listening to Corinna for the first half of the evening, as the West German talked about her life and commented on the 'new Bundesländer':

Traumhaft, zumindest aus der Touristenperspektive. Für die Einheimischen war es gewiß ganz anders. Hart. Da gebe ich mich keinen Illusionen hin und will mir auch kein Urteil anmaßen.

It seems that with the beginning of her 'autobiography', Marianne quite possibly had her actual life story in mind:

- Es ist an der Zeit, daß Sie die Wahrheit über mich erfahren, sagte ich. Oder anders gesagt, ich möchte Ihnen von meinem Leben erzählen.

She then goes on, however, with Corinna's unintentional help, to make up a story of lies in place of her actual life history: "Auf [Corinna's] Gesicht sah ich meine Geschichte umgesetzt in Mienenspiel. Ich sprach und wollte weitersprechen, ganz versessen auf diesen schönen Spiegel" (p.231). Marianne wants to see how her listener will respond. Corinna asks leading questions, such as "Sie wurden schwanger, nicht wahr?" and "Er hat Sie zur Abtreibung gezwungen, nicht wahr?" Marianne complies to these questions and to the expectations that Corinna has. Brigitte Burmeister speaks of this phenomenon in *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu* (P.67) when she comments: "daß die umlaufenden Klischees, gegenwärtig, ein Indiz unserer wechselseitigen Fremdheit sind. Die kann auch zu Idealisierungen führen, wie es "dem Volk" der DDR im Herbst '89 widerfahren ist, oder den Westlern in der ersten Zeit nach dem Fall der Mauer".

Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich deal with the topic of stereotypes in their book *"Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern"*. They define the work clearly with the sentence: "Wer von [Vorurteilen] sicher gedeckt ist, lebt oft angenehm, denn er weiß mühelos über Dinge Bescheid, von denen er wenig versteht" (*Trauern*, p.135). How do stereotypes come about? According to the Mitscherlichs, "Wir kennen jemanden vielleicht nur flüchtig, dann wird über ihn von Leuten, die uns wichtig sind, abschätzig gesprochen. Schon finden auch wir ihn egoistisch, eitel, unaufrichtig, oder was immer gegen ihn vorgebracht wird" (p.136). The problems with stereotypes is that in the forming of them, our critical abilities are numbed, so that we are not objective in our thinking: "Unser Mißtrauen, unsere Vorsicht sind eingeschläfert und wie gelähmt", and also, stereotypes are "unter Umständen...viel haltbarer als staatliche Gebilde".

The latter is the problem that Marianne and Corinna face as they converse at the party.

Solutions to the problem of building and judging by stereotypes are also given in *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*:

Je besser es und gelingt, uns, selbst im Aufruhr unserer Gefühle, nachdenkend zu beobachten, desto besser sind die Chancen, nicht unbemerkt unbewußten Steuerungen unterworfen zu sein... Vorurteile können dann zurückgedrängt werden, wenn es uns gelingt, Reflexion vor jene Handlungen einzulegen, zu der die Vorurteile uns auffordern. (p.156)

The difficulty that most people find in doing this show the power that a stereotype practices, and through that we see the endangering of the freedom of thought of each individual within his/her society. Because Marianne is so prone to fantasise, she needs to take particular care that she herself does not fall into the trap of filling in the unknown details of a person by means of fiction.

It seems that Marianne has discovered this for herself when speaking to Norma later at the cafe. She realises that she no longer wants to make up life stories for people if they are not true to that person. As I mentioned in my introduction, Norma and Marianne often created backgrounds for the people they saw around them, making up details or pinning to them a true history that belongs to someone else. This is what Marianne starts to do for the long-haired man at the pub (p.264ff), when she tells Norma of the life of Saint-Just. She begins the story telling it in the present tense, as though foretelling the long-haired man's life, but then swaps back to finish the story in the past tense, telling the history of Saint-Just "damit [Norma] es weiß. Und weil ich mir nichts ausdenken will." (p.271)

This reminiscing on the life and values of Saint-Just leads to the developing of a 'Freundschaftsbund' between Marianne and Norma. Through this act, Marianne moves on from using her imagination for comfort in her loneliness, to using it to establish a hope for the future that will help her to step out into the changing society. Like the French revolutionary, Marianne wants to bring about "das Reich der Tugend". The difference is that the tool to use is not terror, as was the case two hundred years ago, but love and friendship:

Norma schenkte ein, hob ihr Glas.
 - Auf Saint-Just, sagte sie. Einverstanden?
 Mit allem jetzt. Ich lobte Norma und den Wein, die Milde der Nacht, auch die Wiederkehr eines abgeschafften Grußwortes. Sie mochte es nie, sagte Norma, als sie noch Mitglied im Jugendverband war, mit "Freundschaft!" angeherrscht zu werden und zurückzubrüllen im Verein, aber vorhin habe es sich ganz gut geeignet, als Kampfgruß. (p.275)

France is not just an inspiration from years gone by. Not unlike many other East Germans, Norma looks to France after the collapse of the wall, in order to find a model of how East Germany should develop. France is more of a welfare state than West Germany. Norma spent some time in France:

Sie kehrte tief beeindruckt zurück. Eine Zeitlang trug sie sich mit dem Plan, in die Haute Provence überzusiedeln. Das große Deutschland, das uns blüht, sei ihr unheimlich, sagte sie, und dort unten, in der Kooperative, habe sie wunderbare Menschen kennengelernt, Solidarität in Aktion. (p.198/9)

Like Norma, Marianne is also linked to France, both through her interest in Saint-Just and also through her name, 'Marianne'. Christine Cosentino is a critic who sees the connection between the utopian ideals of Saint-Just and the friendship of the 'two' women. She also recognises the irony used:

Das von Burmeister mit freundlicher Ironie anvisierte neue utopische Modell ist der auf den Ideen Saint-Justs und auf dem Konzept einer konstruktiven

Streitkultur beruhende Freundschaftsbund zwischen zweier Frauen, die in ihrer Mentalität als völlig konträr, unvollkommen und verschieden konzipiert sind.⁷¹

The alliance that Max seals between Marianne and Norma (pp.281ff) is an example of how an understanding can be reached between the peoples of East Germany and West Germany; by avoiding the temptation to believe stereotypes, by resisting the temptation to chose to either forget the past or to hold on to a hundred years of hate ("Widerstehen wir der Wahl zwischen Vergessen und hundert Jahren Haß!"), and by keeping one's eyes open to the events of the past and present. The alliance is significant for a second reason, however, as it represents the reconciliation of Marianne with herself. Throughout the novel, Norma has expressed those thoughts that Marianne did not want to think, but that she has now come around to. The two sides of Marianne come together in the act of sealing a "Freundschaftsbund".

From what we have seen, it is clear that Marianne leads an intense inner life of dreams, wishes and hopes, and relies on the voices that talk to her. Her imaginary daughter, Emilia, appears to her in times of loneliness and despair; in moments of separation from Johannes. Words used in describing Emilia emphasise her illusory existence, as do the situations she is found in. Originally appearing too soon to be the child that Johannes and Marianne were not able to have, Emilia is someone to whom Marianne feels the affinity of family and represents the future generation, bringing to Marianne the hope of a utopian future, a future in which she will no longer make up stories to fill the vacuum of the unknown. This is why in the final paragraph of the book, Marianne's hopes are projected onto what she

⁷¹ Christine COSENTINO

would like to hear Emilia say. Like Emilia, Norma can be seen as an inner voice from which Marianne seeks assurance and the promise of future hope. She is Marianne's other self, owning up to truths that Marianne was initially reluctant to accept. The bond of friendship then, which the narrator finally forms with her, is the expression of Marianne's readiness to unite the two sides of her own self.

CHAPTER FIVE - RECURRING IMAGES AND LEITMOTIFS

After having discussed in the preceeding chapters the main themes and intentions of the book, I will now turn to some structural elements which give the book its extraordinary precision and cohesion. A closer reading of the novel will reveal that Brigitte Burmeister strategically structures her text through the repetition of recurring images, motifs⁷², and patterns. One can indeed speak of leitmotifs.⁷³ Recurring images are important indicators of which subjects are of particular importance to author and narrator alike. In this chapter I intend to trace first motifs and then leitmotifs to show their significance in relation to the events of the novel and the intentions of the author. They fit into the structure of the book as a whole, which is itself circular. The text becomes a tightly woven fabric, and the repetition of the same images is like continual appearance of the same coloured threads, creating patterns in the work. The most prominent colour - the most important motif - is the house itself. The novel begins and ends with the East Berlin tenement block, and it is to this building that the thoughts of the narrator

⁷² In *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (ed. E.W.Herd and August Obermayer, Dunedin: University of Otago, Department of German, 1983), A literary motif is described as: A structural component of the content/subject-matter complex and characterized by the following: (a) It is a self-contained unity, as it can exist outside a specific context... (b) It fulfils a necessary function in relation to the over-riding thematic context or dramatic process;... (c) It is a phenomenon which occurs traditionally or intrinsically within a work. (d) It is an occurrence or action rather than an object, state, concept or topic. ... *Leitmotive* are normally not proper motifs but rather structural or stylistic elements.

⁷³ Schon J.PETERSEN (Julius PETERSEN, *Die Wissenschaft von der Dichtung*, 1944, p.169ff) hat das sog. 'Leitmotiv' von den echten Motiven gesondert. Der von der Musik Wagners her auf die Literatur übertragene Begriff meint die Wiederholung der gleichen Wortfolge, mindestens in Anklängen oder leichten Abwandlungen, an verschiedenen Stelle eines dichterischen Werkes, die durch diese Gemeinsamkeit miteinander in Beziehung gesetzt werden... Leitmotive sind also keine Bestandteile des Inhalts, keine echten Motive, sie sind auch keineswegs 'leitend', sondern stilistische, tectonische, gliedernde Elemente, die eine Art musikalischen Effekt haben und einem Refrain gleichen. ...Das Leitmotiv kann auch symbolhaften Charakter haben und ist überhaupt in seiner rhythmisierenden Funktion dem Symbol verwandt. Elizabeth FRENZEL, *Stoff-, Motiv- und Symbolforschung*, Stuttgart, J.B.Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963 (second edition), p.32/3

constantly return. Marianne and Johannes often remember the same situation differently, and the differences between husband and wife are followed through the novel. Beginning with these differences, I will then look at the continual references to East German aspects of life before picking up on other visual motifs, such as the cat and Norma's hair. An important leitmotif that is audible throughout the book is that of the noises around the tenement block and the voices of the past that blend in with them.

We saw in Chapter One how Marianne views the house differently to Johannes, and now I shall pick up on this in order to show the significance of the recurring descriptions of the house. Marianne and Johannes often look at the same experience differently. Johannes rejects everything about the East German past and forgets everything about the happiness that he and Marianne once shared in their marriage. He cuts himself off entirely from the past, in order to start a new life. Marianne introduces this idea as she introduces the afore-mentioned stairwell. For her it is "dämmerig und still", for him it is "finster und öde", as he stated in his last letter. He writes:

Schlußstrich, anders kann ich ein neues Leben nicht
beginnen, außerdem verbindet mich nichts mit dem
alten Jammertal,...nichts, dich ausgenommen...

He then goes on to paint a word picture of the view to distant mountains, the sloping vineyards and the Rhineland plains. He describes to his wife the "heitere Ruhe des Gärtchens und die vollkommen schöne Wohnung" (p.8). Already here we see the contrast between the Rhineland and East Berlin. The "Häßlichkeit" of the Mietshaus (p.7, p.21, p.143, p.215) is compared to the "vollkommen schöne Wohnung" in which Johannes lives (p.8, p.204, p.210, 211). Later, Marianne imagines how the delicate dancer, Corinna,

would look against the setting of the East German tenement block: "Als Fremdkörper umgeben von Müllgeruch und den grauen Wänden unseres Hofes" (p.219).

Marianne's rebuttle to Johannes' letter is made by describing the weather at present, where the sky over East Berlin is forget-me-not blue and the city is swimming in light (p.9). She then goes on to describe the people, who "sahen...aus, als hätten sie der Zeitung geglaubt: Soviel Anfang war noch nie". Johannes praises the materialism of the West, but to Marianne, it is the people who are more important. She may have just the one apartment, but to her, the whole house is home, along with all the people in it. The house is not an empty shell that serves as shelter, but is a place of comfort and familiarity. On page 175, Marianne refers to the tenement block as "Das Vertraute", and on page 215 she refers to the apartment as "rissig und grau...aber...meine".

In comparison to the apartment that the couple lived in earlier, a flat in the same tenement block but on a lower level, the present apartment is very well lit. It is ironic that it was for Marianne that the couple moved upstairs, that Johannes could have happily continued living in the other "sogar in einer viel schlimmeren" (p.11). now Marianne is happy where she is, and Johannes has a "Begeisterung für schönes Wohnen". Marianne reasons that "weil [Johannes] früh aus dem Haus mußte...", he does not know how light the apartment is in the mornings. On a factual level, his leaving the house earlier refers to him leaving for work every morning. On another level however, it is possible to read that he had an inner urge to leave the house once and for all, as he eventually does.

The section spanning pages 205 to 216 picks up again on the contrasting world of Johannes' new suburb and the central city apartment that Marianne prefers. Once more, it is the words the Burmeister chooses that create the atmosphere at each place. The section begins: "Er sah so künstlich aus, ein Bild von einem Spitz". It is a dog that is being described, but the adjective "künstlich" seems to follow through to describe the dark green hedges and the red path ("wie geschaffen für sein Weiß"), just as the word "Spitz" implies that everything is clear cut, with every leaf and stone sitting in its allocated place. The "gleichmäßige[s] Rhythmus" of the dog's steps, "in geringfügig gesteigertem Tempo" also adds an almost pedantic regularity to the atmosphere.

Three times in this section, Marianne acknowledges from where she is reminiscing: back at the apartment, where "das Zimmer muß gemalert werden". One particular phrase is repeated twice: "nur das Rauschen der Stadt, *einschläfernd wie die Wärme*" (p.206), "Die Geräusche vom Hof sind angenehm und *einschläfernd wie die Wärme.*" (p.216) (my italics). Here, the rhythm of the words and the repetition of the long, slow 'ä' sound create a more soothing atmosphere, and the image is of the warm, sheltered protection of a womb. The muggy warmth of a late summer afternoon also contrasts with the still, clear morning in West Germany that foretells a day of heat: "Der Tag würde heiß werden" (p.205). The silence of the dog's steps in the West ("monoton und unhörbar") is contrasted with sound of men working in the East ("Stimmen und andere Geräusche kommen von hinten, aus der Werkstatt des Schildermalers").

The leitmotiv of the noises associated with the East Berlin tenement block I shall look at in more depth later, but first I would like to study the many references to the

courtyard. Marianne works from home, sitting at her desk looking down at the "zweite Hinterhof" (pp.12, 15, 147). From here she has a good view of the "Gartenecke" (pp.147, 166, 255), and she listens to the footsteps of those coming home from work (p.15) and to the blackbird (p.32).

Where each apartment shows the individuality of its tenants (the König sisters': "Ihre Wohnung war ein Museum für Kriegsnarben", p.28; Frau Schwarz's: "das Rasseln der Schlüssel am Bund, das Knacken und Klicken der Schlösser, ...Da hatte Frau Schwarz die Tür aufbekommen und entließ einen Schwall Wohnungsgeruch in das Treppenhaus", p.9), the courtyards are where the people are brought together ("...und geht...in den zweiten Hof, wo die Schildermaler beim Bier sitzen in der sonnigen Gartenecke", p.147; "Niemand ist gekommen, ...da habe ich an eine Versammlung im Freien gedacht", p.151). The separate apartments are not what makes the tenement block a living community. Again, Burmeister makes this point with the use of a repeated phrase: "eine graue grämliche Masse, in vier Schichten auf das Vorderhaus und die hinteren Eingänge A bis E verteilt" (p.7), "in vier Schichten auf das Vorderhaus, die hinteren Aufgänge A bis E verteilt und voneinander getrennt durch Zwischenräume, abgeschirmt durch Wände" (p.127). The importance of the house as a whole, therefore, lies not only on the fact that for Marianne, her home is her castle, but also on the community that is to be found in such a group of apartments. The phrase "mit Haus und Hof" encircles the whole of one's existence, just as "Haus und Hof verlassen" is to leave one's life behind. The tenement block, with its apartments and courtyards, constitutes both identity and belonging, therefore, hence the significance of her thoughts constantly returning there.

The house is built at the meeting place of two streets, and this is also mentioned repeatedly. The first paragraph of the novel describes the general area and to bring the focus onto the tenement block, the second paragraph begins: "Von der Ecke, an der das Haus steht..." (p.7). Later: "an deren Ecke das Haus sich befindet" (p.8), "...gingen wir auf die Ecke zu, an der unser Haus steht" (p.34), "Das Haus an der Ecke war plötzlich da" (p.126). Here, the repetition reminds us that the tenement block is a cornerstone of German history.

Something else that Marianne constantly returns to is the memories of everyday life in East Germany. The lack of colourful advertisements posted into letterboxes everyday is repeated (pp.143/4, 187/8), showing first a negative side of the GDR ("Blaß und mager der Inhalt der Briefkästen bei uns, damals, als die Ämter wenig, die Geschäfte gar nichts mitzuteilen hatten", p.144), and then a positive side ("Hinter den freundlichen Grüßen [of the junkmail since reunification] vermißt du den freundlichen Staat. Die persönliche Anrede nimmst du persönlich, du Nummer", p.188).

Marianne recalls an overheard conversation of years earlier, when Frau Samuel speaks to Frau Schwarz of her dreams:

...wenn wir auchmal rüber könnten, an den Rhein oder in den Schwarzwald oder nach Helgoland, mein Traum seit der Schulzeit, aber vor der Rente nicht daran zu denken, noch neunzehn Jahre... (p.159)

This is a memory of the tight visa restrictions enforced by the Communist regime. A visa to the West was seldom granted to an East German citizen with potential to work. Once they retired, however, the state would be more

cooperative; their reasoning being that if the pensioner failed to return to East Germany, it was one less superannuation to be paid out.

Marianne recalls also the brown pieces of paper that "einmal alles bedeckten" (p.162), she recalls what the money in East Germany looked like, as well as the "Etiketten auf den Konservendosen, Gläsern und Flaschen...die Briefmarken und Fahrscheine, die Zahnpastatuben, Hautcremedosen, Haarbürsten, Nagelfeilen, Papiersevietten..." (p.165): things that the shops "*1000 kleine Dinge*" stocked, or were out of stock of once again. The narrator imagines herself joining those drinking together in the *Gartenecke*, so that she can ask Herr Behr about "Unterschieden: Zwischen den Rohren, Ventilen, Schellen, Muffen, Hähnen von früher und den jetzigen. Nicht Preisunterschiede [sondern] die Eigenschaften" (p.167).

Emilia, representative of the future, admits that she is not interested in the past unless the stories of the past begin as they should with "Es war einmal..." (p.120). She does comment on East Germany and the comparisons that people constantly draw between then and now:

...wozu dieses dauernde Gerede von früher, war es denn soviel besser, soviel schlechter? ...irgendwie ruhiger und leerer kann es gewesen sein, oft trübe, ja ohne großartige Aussichten, gedämpft, gedrückt, gesichert, gewohnt, gemütlich (p.121).

Although Emilia's message is that Marianne, in fighting to remember the past, must not live in it but needs to move on into the future, she too sums up some of the differences that people are experiencing. The constant references throughout the book to how things were in East Germany help to keep the memories of that state alive, as is the

intention of Brigitte Burmeister. ("Vor allem wollte ich Erinnerung bewahren.")⁷⁴

Another visual motif, this time a leitmotif, that I would like to examine is that of the cat. Both the West and the East German house has a cat that is associated with it. In the West, the cat is Marianne's only companion during the day: "Die Tage begannen wolkenlos und vergingen in freundlichem Gleichmaß. Die Wohnung, die Katze, der Garten und abends Johannes" (p.213). The West German tabby "kehrte aus dem hohem Gras zurück" as Marianne enjoys an evening with Johannes and comments that she is pleased to be there. As she enjoys an evening with Norma after leaving the West, however, Marianne considers that the lawn, which Johannes has mown since the cat hid there, will soon be long enough to hide that cat once more (p.272).

As the West German guests move after dinner to sit outside, the tabby cat leaves the garden (p.223). Marianne sits under a nut tree alone, "wie zuvor die Katze", and waits for Corinna. She imagines what Emilia would say of her at that moment: "Wie du dahockst, als wolltest du dich in eine Katze verwandeln" (p.224). Later, back at the East German tenement block, "hockte eine von den schwarzweißen Hofkatzen, die sich nicht anfassen ließen" (p.285). The cat is at home in the courtyard, just as Marianne is. These last two quotes are what make the motif a leitmotif. Like Marianne, the cat symbolises the coming together of two different aspects. Just as black and white are found together on the one cat, and just as the *Freundschaftsbund* joins two sides of the one person, there is hope that the two sides of Germany can also exist side by side, but without one colour being lost in the other, as it is on the tabby cat.

⁷⁴ Hella KAISER

The West German tabby comes out of the long grass, making itself visible when Marianne and Johannes are happy together (p.210), but cannot remain with Marianne in the garden while she is experiencing such isolation from the West Germans (p.223). The possibility of a blending of the two attitudes of East and West is not possible while Marianne is giving in to the stereotypical expectations of the West Germans. The cat returns to Marianne only when she no longer wants to continue her story (p.244). The black and white cat in the East has the two contrasting colours together, just as the East and the West can come together if they join in friendship, like Marianne and Norma do.

A further visual image that is repeated is the description of Norma's hair: "diese knisternde, krause, kastanienbraune Mähne" (p.57). The description of Norma's hair and Marianne's reaction to it depict warmth, shelter, closeness, intimacy, and even an erotic intensity:

Ich befühlte sie zwischen den Fingern, drang tiefer...und plötzlich, als Norma mich an sich zog, einsog, nichts sah, nur spürte, daß mir schwindelig war. (p.57)

Marianne would react in the same way to Emilia's "strubbeliges braunes Haar, das zum Hineingreifen lockte" (p.118), but, like the black and white cat, Emilia seldom gets close enough for Marianne to be able to reach out and touch her.⁷⁵ Their hair, and Marianne's desire to stroke it, is something that Norma and Emilia, the two Erscheinungen, have in common. It is an erotic picture that brings out a female element. Where a physical relationship is portrayed between Marianne and Max (pp.64,

⁷⁵ "zum hineingreifen lockte, aber sie saß zu weit weg", (p.118); "nicht weit von mir, doch selten in Reichweite", (p.116)

66) and Marianne and Johannes (p.201), the image of Marianne burying her face in Norma's hair speaks of an emotional bond between the two women.

Through the *Fremde Frau* taking on Norma's hair and voice⁷⁶, it is made clear, as we saw earlier, that the argument with this stranger is a continuation of the argument going on inside of Marianne. The image is repeated as an indication to the reader that the *fremde Frau* has not just the hair and voice, but also other attributes that we already associate with Norma, ie Norma's opinions of *Inoffiziellen Mitarbeitern* and how the guilt of the Stasi should be distributed. The hair motif is therefore not only something that Emilia and Norma have in common (along with their distinctive voices), but is also an image that is associated with Norma, to identify her opinions when they are expressed by a stranger.

Like the visual motifs, the audible ones are also symbolic. Marianne plans to describe the noises in the courtyard in the next letter she will write to Johannes. The "Geräusche auf dem Hof" and the noises within the apartment block are repeatedly mentioned by her throughout the novel: "Ich kannte die Geräusche..." (p.9); "Die Geräusche steigen an mir vorbei, dahin ins Blaue." (p.12); "Trotz seiner Lautstärke ist er der Stille, wie ich sie hier kenne, näher als den Geräuschen aus dem Freien" (p.12); "Die übrigen Geräusche von draußen stören mich nicht." (p.19); "Ein schwaches Geräusch." (p.35); "hätte ich ihr Geräusch nicht gehört..." (p.126); "wo manchmal Geräusche dringen" (p.127), to list a few. They are the voices of both the past and the present. The sounds of the present are the residents that talk to one another while crossing the

⁷⁶ "Die fremde Frau schüttelt den Kopf, daß ihre Haare fliegen, sich entfalten zu einer knisternden Mähne, und sagt zu mir mit Normas Stimme..." (p.150).

courtyard, those working there ("Sie sprechen hier oft so laut. Einer von den Handwerkern, denke ich", p.209), or who finish the working day with a beer together in the "Gartenecke" ("Ich lehnte neben Norma aus dem Fenster. Am Tisch der Biertrinker saß Frau Klarkowski", p.255). There is also the noise that Frau Schwarz makes as she locks or unlocks her well fortified door⁷⁷, and the footsteps of people crossing the courtyard: ("Unten auf dem Hof klingen sie alle ähnlich, höre ich einzelne nur heraus, wenn ihr Gang sehr laut oder von besonderen Geräuschen begleitet ist", p.16; "Stimmen, Schritte, den geringen Lärm des Schildermalers und der Klempner...laufenden Motoren...der Kreissäge..." p.12; "Im Hof plätschert Wasser. Stimmen und andere Geräusche kommen von hinten", p.206).

The voices of the past are more subtle, yet are just as real to Marianne. In the winter months, when she can no longer work beside an open window, Marianne hears steps in the attic: "rätselhaft, denn es gibt da oben nichts außer Schutt und Staub" (p.12). On page 15, the steps in the attic are referred to again, as Marianne anticipates finishing the translation of Saint-Just's biography in six months: "an irgendeinem trüben Tag, an dem ich vielleicht das Gehen auf dem Dachboden wieder hören werde". As well as carrying through the leitmotif, this simple sentence indicates that Marianne never imagined living permanently in West Germany.

Thinking about the sounds in the attic ("Ganz normale Schritte, sonderbar nur, weil es dort oben nichts zu suchen gibt und niemand hingeht", p.15), leads Marianne on to think about the sounds of different people going up and

⁷⁷ "das Rasseln der Schlüssel am Bund, das Knacken und Klicken der Schlösser", p.9; "Endlich...rasselten die Schlüssel, knackte das Schloß, fiel die Tür zu und rastete die Kette ein", p.44

down the stairs. Again, these are noises from the past, kept alive only in Marianne's memory: "Sie weiß ich noch, auch wenn ich sie nicht mehr höre. Johannes, die Schwestern König, Herrn Samuel, ...Margarete Bauer" (p.16).

The ambiguity of the wording allows some passages to be read on two levels. The "Fegen, Schleifen, Klirren und Scheppern" that belongs to "unhörbaren Schritten" (p.16) is the sound of Herr Kühne sweeping the courtyard, when understood on a factual level. On a fantasy level, however, the verbs chosen bring with them the association of ghosts, reminding us once more of the voices of the past that inhabit the tenement block. Again on page 127:

Ruhe und Geborgenheit in den eignen vier Wänden,
Lichtjahre entfernt von den Nachbarhöhlen, woher
manchmal Geräusche dringen, deren Urheber, so groß
ist die Entfernung, längst tot sein können.

The same technique is used on page 216, where Marianne's stream-of-consciousness shifts from Johannes returning to an empty house in West Germany to: "Ich höre Stimmen und Gelächter". On a factual level, the noises are made by those drinking beer in the courtyard, but on a fantasy level, they are the voices in Marianne's head, the voices of the past. As the day draws to a close, Marianne, now at one with her 'zweite Ich', anticipates "Kein Schleifen morgen, die gewöhnlichen Geräusche, sonst nichts" (pp.285/6). Again, on a factual level, there will be no sweeping noises because Herr Kühne appears to have left the tenement block, but on a fantasy level, there will be no sweeping noises, because the voices of the past have been laid to rest. Marianne has made a break with the past and is looking into the future.

To summarise this chapter, it seems worthwhile to look once more at the closing paragraphs of the novel (pp.285/6).

Each of the main images and leitmotifs appear one last time here. The cat, on which the contrasting colours, black and white, lie together, “[läßt] sich nicht anfassen”. This symbolises the two sides of Marianne coming together in one body, a uniting of mind. It also suggests hope that East and West will one day be friends: opposites exist side by side in harmony. Marianne notices that the courtyard looks different: “wie in alten Zeiten”, remembering the past, but accepting that it is just that - the past. If Kühne is ill, she realises there will be “kein Schleifen morgen, die gewöhnlichen Geräusche, sonst nichts”. She will not hear him sweeping the courtyard, but also, with her new outlook for the future, she will not hear the sweeping noises in the attic of the ghosts of the past. So Marianne stands in the courtyard, willing for that inner voice, which is Emilia, to proclaim that there is help and hope for the future.

CONCLUSION

As Marianne returns to the tenement block at the conclusion of the novel, she and Norma come across a small sign covering a basement window. Across the white enamel, the blue lettering reads "Kormoran - der letzte Zeuge" (p.284).

Norma stops:

- Was für eine Botschaft, sagte sie, unentschieden zwischen Ausruf und Frage.
Ich zog sie weiter.
- Komm, wir können auch im Gehen raten. Es ist wahrscheinlich der Titel eines Romans, der hier geendet hat.
- Der hier enden wird.
- Ein Roman, auf den schon alle warten. Er handelt von den Abenteuern eines Arbeiterbauern in vierzig ungelebten Jahren.
- Von der Verwandlung des Sonnengotts in einen Schwimmvogel bei Anbruch der Sintflut.
- Vom dem IM, der über die letzte Sitzung des Politbüros berichtet hat.

In the first few years following the reunification of the two Germanies, the public and the critics alike awaited a novel that would deal with the problems involved in rejoining the two societies and that would envision the future of the new German Federal Republic. In the above quote, Brigitte Burmeister acknowledges this anticipation and presents - not without irony - *Unter dem Namen Norma* as such a work of literature. Marianne makes the link for us when she suggests that the novel *Kormoran* is about:

unserem Abtauchen in den Untergrund. Du wirst die Anführerin einer lokalen Utopistensekte, die in Kellern konspiriert und sich als Gesangsverein tarnt, Normachor, daher der Name Kormoran.

The novel is about Marianne and Norma (whose name is an acronym for the German word for novel, 'Roman'), and their hopes of a better future. It is about forty years of an 'Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat', and the choices that the "Arbeiterbauer" must make, now that the "vierzig

ungelebte(n) Jahre(n)" are over. It is filled with optimism, suggesting that the "Sonnengott", changed into a "Schwimmvogel", will be able to keep its head above water "bei Anbruch der Sintflut". Rather than suggesting that it does not matter what happens after we have gone (the German phrase 'Nach uns die Sintflut'), this novel shows that the present needs affirmation of the past before it can look with hope towards the future.

With the enamel sign 'Kormoran', Brigitte Burmeister not only presents her own novel as an answer to the call of the critics: She is also acknowledging, but not necessarily agreeing with, the work of Hermann Kant that was published in the same year as *Norma* and goes under the title *Kormoran*. The surname of the main character, Paul-Martin Kormoran, is discussed by other characters in the novel (p49-51). Many of the same issues are discussed in both *Kormoran* and *Norma*, but Kant deals with them in a more direct manner. Brigitte Burmeister's tone is often ironic and the memories are not to be read as a museum of facts, but rather as a gallery of collected art, sometimes realism, sometimes impressionism. While it is clear that Brigitte Burmeister alludes to Hermann Kant's work through her character's conversation (I refer in particular to the mention of the Schwimmvogel and to the "IM, der über die letzte Sitzung des Politbüros berichtet hat"), *Norma* and Marianne are writing themselves into the book by the comments they make.

We have seen that Brigitte Burmeister's intentions in writing the novel included showing a true picture of East Germany, so as to change the view that the GDR was either black or white, good or bad. In accepting that the state had both good and bad aspects, we are able to protect the

memories of that past as we step into the future, for the future is the product of the past. A further intention that we have seen realised is the resolution of Burmeister's to challenge her readers to deal with their past, rather than ignore it, so that they do not make the same mistake again that was made in dealing with the National Socialist past, as discussed by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich in their book *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*. Without trying to transfer the comments of the Mitscherlichs' from postwar to postwende Germany, Brigitte Burmeister picks up on issues that are relevant to both situations.

We have seen how the narrator of *Unter dem Namen Norma* has similar intentions as the author, in her attempt to collect stories from the past, and also in her search for a future that has learned from the mistakes of the past. For the author, this is the Nazi-past in particular: "Zum Antifaschismus in der DDR gehörte eine erhebliche Geschichtsverzerrung"⁷⁸, for the narrator it is also the French revolution: "Robespierre [glaubte an] die vorläufige Notwendigkeit des Terrors im Dienste der Tugend" (p.270). This belief, upheld by the Communist hardliners, is something the novel seems to reject. It is through the partly autobiographical narrator that Brigitte Burmeister's view of the Wende is revealed. Of the March 1990 elections and the resulting reunification, for example, Marianne comments in her journal: "Wir mußten den Sieg der Mehrheit verwinden" (p.197). Brigitte Burmeister, who would have liked to have written a journal over that time remembers her response to the outcome of the elections:

Es gab Tränen, auch mein Mann hat geweint, und ich
erinnere mich an ein Gemisch aus furchtbarer

⁷⁸ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabus*, p.47

Enttäuschung, Wut auf die "blöden Massen" und etwas wie Beklommenheit...⁷⁹

Brigitte Burmeister also uses the East German tenement block, a cross-section of past and present German societies, to develop her ideas. The situation of the building establishes immediately an air of historical authenticity, because it is in the centre of Berlin, on a street that has regained its Prussian name since reunification, and not far from Wilhelmstraße, which will soon be home once again to many of Germany's government buildings. The house is situated in an area that "hieß weiter Mitte, als er längst Rand war" and is strikingly similar to the house in which the author herself lives: "Von ihrem Balkon aus kann Brigitte Burmeister beobachten, wie Berlin zusammenwächst. Der ehemalige Grenzstreifen ist kaum mehr als einen Steinwurf weit weg." (Hella KAISER)

As each day of the story unfolds and between recalling stories of the past, the narrator returns constantly in her thoughts to the tenement block, her apartment there, and her window view onto the second courtyard. The courtyard becomes a leitmotif, symbolising the community of the tenement block, for it is in the courtyard that the residents gather to discuss the past, the present changes, and the future outlook. It is also in the courtyard that the workers gather for a beer or to after work.

Other leitmotifs such as the cat and the noises in the attic make statements about themes such as dealing with the past. "Kein Schleifen morgen" (p.285) shows that Marianne has successfully found a way to remember the past and yet not to live in it at the expense of the present and the

⁷⁹ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.109

future. The black and white cat shows that the two sides of Marianne have come together to form a functional whole. In this way, the author's technique supports the intentions that she had in writing the novel.

Marianne's constant reflection of past events and conversations, however, is the most direct means used by the author to help develop an argument. The memories that float through the narrator's stream of consciousness bring to life many events and aspects of life of East Germany. From the thousand small items that were sold in the shops known as "1000 kleine Dinge" (p.165), to the "Mauern, Türme, Drähte, Verhaue, Gräben, Wachposten, Hunde", to the lack of junkmail (pp.98, 187), the novel is a goldmine of East German memories. To the East German, this is the chance to relive how things were, and to commit the images to memory. Very importantly, it also helps to re-establish an identity, a feeling of self which many people felt threatened when forty years of their lives seemed to have lost their purpose. To those who did not live in the German Democratic Republic, the novel offers a chance to learn of all those smaller and larger things that helped to make East Germany unique, through both the references to East German life, and also through the many people that Marianne introduces us to, one way or another.

The insight into life in East Germany also offers the outsider a chance to understand the background that has made East Germans who they are. Accurate knowledge breaks down the wall formed by stereotyping and leads to more legitimate expectations. Brigitte Burmeister acknowledges in an essay that stereotypes do exist:

In den Verständigungsschwierigkeiten zwischen Deutschen aus Ost und West können jetzt erst die nichtideologisierten, die realen Differenzen wirklich hervortreten, Unterschiede in Erfahrungen und Mentalitäten, für deren Artikulation es keine gemeinsame Sprache gibt.⁸⁰

In *Norma*, the stereotypes are also acknowledged. Marianne and Corinna's conversation touches on the subject of "das arrogante Auftreten all dieser...Besserwessis" (pp.218/9). Johannes points out Marianne's use of stereotypes:

Hier sehe ich Menschen mit einer Glasur über den Gesichtern, vielleicht zum Schutz gegen die Zeit oder als Visier im Nahkampf, abweisende Gesichter jedenfalls. (Marianne)

Natürlich, sagte Johannes, Westmenschen wie sie im Buche stehen! (p.211)⁸¹

This conversation is written by the author in irony. Brigitte Burmeister has commented about how people must not be tempted:

nur von den eigenen Vorstellungen oder gar Zwangsvorstellungen auszugehen, wie etwas zu sein hat, damit es funktioniert, sich rechnet etc, sondern sich mit "denen dort" - den Fremden, im Grunde genommen - auszutauschen, sie kennenzulernen und gemeinsam zu bedenken, was sie wollen, was sie können, was sie vorschlagen.⁸²

Margarete Mitscherlich points to the view that many West Germans have of their brothers in the East:

Die sind alle spießbürgerlich, die sind alle faul, die ahmen alles nach... Außerdem sind sie alle Nazis, noch viel fremdenfeindlicher als wir, Polen behandeln sie wie die letzten Menschen und auch die Schwarzen werden dort mißhandelt. Das sind alles Vorurteile, die ich häufig höre. Wir sehen die Osis, wie wir

⁸⁰ Brigitte BURMEISTER, *Gute Nacht Du Schöne*, p.36

⁸¹ "diese kapitalistische Charaktermaske, tritt nun hier und da leibhaftig auf und verhält sich, wie es im Buche steht, und ehe einer kapiert hat, daß dies jetzt kein Propagandafilm ist, sondern Wirklichkeit, ist er schon abgewickelt", *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.115

⁸² *Wir haben ein Berührungstabu*, p.119

uns vorstellen, so waren wir während der Nazizeit: kleine, *grämliche, graue* Menschen, jetzt sogar noch ohne Sieges-Attitüde, die sie immerhin mit ihren wehenden Fahnen unter Erich hatten.⁸³ (my italics)

This portrayal of how many West Germans see East Germans is quite correct, so for Brigitte Burmeister, it was important to show that the inhabitants of the East German tenement block are not merely “eine *graue, grämliche* Masse, in vier Schichten auf das Vorderhaus und die hinteren Eingänge A bis E verteilt” (p.7, my italics), but that “Wenn man jedoch eine Weile stehen bleibt, treten aus den Türen Einzelne, die lächeln oder zufällig bunt sind” (p.7). By the use of irony and by looking closer at the lives of the East Germans, Burmeister makes her point.

Those people that grace the tenement block with their presence in the 1990s are not the only residents to whom the reader is introduced. The noises in the attic that Marianne repeatedly refers to (pp.16, 127, 216, 285) are the movements of the ghosts of the past. By facing some of these ghosts, Marianne becomes aware of the way past residents, and therefore past societies, have dealt with changing times. Through this, she is able to make a more informed choice of how she should move on. By reading the letters of the König sisters, which the comment about the “Nachbarhöhlen, woher manchmal Geräusche dringen, deren Urheber, so groß ist die Entfernung, längst tot sein können” (p.127) could well refer to, Marianne sees how the sisters and their friend Claire dealt with the effects of the first and second World Wars.

Because the comparisons between Minna and Marianne show a striking similarity,⁸⁴ as do those between Claire and

⁸³ *Wir haben ein Berührungstabus*, p.66

⁸⁴ “...Minna König, die der Freundin hätte folgen sollen, anstatt bis an ihr Ende auf graue Wände zu blicken und sehr traurige Briefe zu schreiben.

Johannes⁸⁵, Marianne is able to see her own situation mirrored in that of Minna and Claire. On the basis of the consequences of their decisions, she chooses how she will deal with the present changes. In leaving behind all she knew, cutting herself off from her identity, Claire left herself open to loneliness in her latter years. In refusing to be a part of the new society, Minna also ended her days with a life of tragic emptiness. This is what Marianne wants to avoid by choosing to stay in her familiar environment. In addition, by accepting her own history - and therefore identity, including both the good and the bad aspects of the GDR, Marianne is able to put the ghosts of the past to rest as she moves on into the new, unified Germany, and to reassure herself of her identity.

In covering the theme of how to deal with the past, Brigitte Burmeister touches on many issues raised in Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's book *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*. Written in response to the post World War Two attitudes to the Nazi-past, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, is relevant also in response to the post-Wende attitudes to the German Democratic Republic. It was possible to show how Johannes takes the road that is criticised in *Die Unfähigkeit...*, ignoring the past and its good qualities and exaggerating the bad qualities. It was possible to show how Marianne seeks to find the balance suggested in *Die Unfähigkeit...*; the balance between living in the past and cutting oneself off from the past. Finally, it could also be demonstrated how Brigitte Burmeister encourages her readers to find out the truth about issues that are foreign to them and to overcome stereotypes by presenting them in an ironic light. What Alexander and Margarete

Also die Wohnungen ringsum schon leer, die Leute unterwegs nach USA und Kanada, ins sonnige Australien. Nur ich bin noch hier..." (p.132)

⁸⁵ "er [hat] sich, kurz vor dem Umzug, den Bart abrasiert" (p.107)

Mitscherlich, in an abstract form, had intended with their readers in *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, Brigitte Burmeister, in a novellistic manner, intends in *Norma*.

In light of these parallels, and in view of the link that her interview with Margarete Mitscherlich constitutes, *Norma* can be seen as a response to *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*. Brigitte Burmeister raises the same issues in relation to the response to the demise of East Germany that the Mitscherlichs had made one generation earlier, as they responded to people's endeavours to move on after the Second World War. The situation is different, but the same rules apply.

Many parallels to the work of Christa Wolf, in particular *Divided Heaven* and 'Juninachmittag', have been uncovered in this investigation of Brigitte Burmeister's text, along with the link between the *IM* suspect in *Norma* and the Stasi codename of Christa Wolf. Through this, Brigitte Burmeister establishes a link between her own ideas, beliefs and values, and those pronounced by Christa Wolf. In regards to *Divided Heaven* and *Norma*, written at the rise and at the fall of the Berlin wall, we are shown once again that "das Spiel bleibt doch immer das gleiche. Die Regeln ändern sich".⁸⁶

In response to the critics, we have seen *Norma* to be far more than "Steife(r), eher biedere(r) Prosa" (Rainer Moritz). Through repetitive images and subtle symbolism, Brigitte Burmeister has produced a book that can successfully challenge both East and West German readers, and from the lack of such literature we can conclude that

"Clara Lentz, seit 1927 Claire Griffith in Amerika" (p.132)

⁸⁶ Christa WOLF, *Der geteilte Himmel*, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH & Co., 1973 (First edition, 1963), p.185

this is an assignment that most authors avoided. Along with other critics mentioned below, Sibylle Cramer is closer to the mark with her comment: "Welch gescheites, welch schönes Buch."

By following the two characters through the novel, we see how Marianne and Johannes choose to remember East Germany differently, just as they each have a different view of the West. To Johannes, it is as though the sun has set in the East and is now rising in the West. In contrast, Marianne does not want the sun to go down on the memories she retains of East Germany. This is summed up in the first few paragraphs of the novel, when the stairwell is described as both "dämmerig und still" and "finster und öde". Eva Kaufmann's comment shows real insight, therefore: "Offensichtlich spielen in diesen konträren Urteilen über ein unschuldiges Treppenhaus die gesamten Lebensorientierungen der Streitenden mit."

The difference in attitudes between husband and wife are most obvious when they throw a party for Johannes' West German friends, and it is the differences between the East and the West that provoke from Marianne the fictional Stasi story. She does not tell this story because she feels the weight of collective guilt on her, acknowledging, according to critic Thomas Kraft, that "Herkunft ohne Schuld nicht sein kann", neither does she speak, as Detlef Kuhlbrodt would have it, "Aus Überdruß am gelangweilt dahinplätschernden Small talk"? Although both these views hold a fragment of truth, rather than reinforce them, a closer analysis of the text has revealed that Marianne tells her story because she feels pressured to live up to the stereotypes that the West Germans have of East Germans. She sees her story mirrored on the face of Corinna, and is

prompted on by the leading questions provided by her one woman audience.

Andreas Rumler suggests that fear and a feeling of inferiority in regards to the West Germans prevent Marianne's transition to West German life. Neither fear nor inferiority stand out at the conclusion of this study as reason to tell the elaborate story, however, unless it be the fear of not living up to the West German expectations, which are really stereotypes, and this seems to be what Rumler has in mind, for he acknowledges that "West- und Ost-Leser dürften ihre Motive je nach dem spezifischen Erfahrungshintergrund anders bewerten".

In reply to the many critics who do not recognise Norma as a friend who belongs only in Marianne's imagination, evidence to show that she is an 'Erfindung' has been substantiated by this investigation. The timing of Norma's first appearance has been examined; at the first moment of change in Marianne's life, her "Amulett aus der Nacht" (p.189) appears. Norma is described as "eine große Gestalt in einem schwarzen Mantel, der mich anwehte..." We have seen how Marianne and Norma agreed on almost everything in the first few months, but as the larger issues encircling reunification became evident, the two women often took opposing stances. As Marianne struggles with issues such as *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, Norma, her 'zweites Ich', represents thoughts that Marianne does not want to admit, even to herself, like the high probability that there will be no 'happy ever after' for her and Johannes. Marianne is passive, Norma is active, and as the two sides of Marianne's personality finally come together, the two women can look forward to sharing insurance premiums, pension and taxes, and to eventually being "im selben Grab eingeschlossen" (p.280).

Words used to describe Norma help to portray her as an 'Erfindung': "Erscheinungen wie Norma" (p.95); "gehütete[s] Bild" (p.90). Brigitte Burmeister uses the same technique to describe Emilia, whose illusory qualities have also been overseen by many critics. Like Norma, the place, time and nature of her first appearance significantly disprove her reality, as does her voice and eyes. Most of all, those critics who do not recognise Emilia as imaginary have overlooked the fact that Marianne is childless. There are critics who have picked up on part of Marianne's use of fantasy, however. Sibylle Cramer acknowledges that "Es spukt unter dem Dach des alten Mietshauses", and recognises also that "die Erzählerin denkt nicht dran zu verraten, wer da so leibhaftig ist und doch ein Gespenst."

I have shown how the situation of the tenement block is symbolic, along with the range of past and present tenants. Not only is the central position of the building significant, but also the individual apartments and the communal courtyards. As Marianne overlooks the second courtyard from her fourth floor window, she hears not just the voices of the present, but also the voices of the past. In view of this, Julianne Sattler is correct in saying that "an diesem Ort geschichtliches Bewußtsein in einer Übergangszeit zwischen damals und morgen registrierbar [ist]", but I must disagree with her statement that "das Fenster zum Hof öffnet ja nicht den Blick auf die große Weltpolitik". Andreas Rumler states that the house and its tenants "fast wie ein Symbol Stadt und Geschichte des Landes repräsentiert", but on the basis of the symbolism I have traced through, I would go one step further and say that the house is a symbol indeed. Thomas Kraft puts it well when he describes how the Mietshaus "dient als

Mikrokosmos, als riesiger Büroschrank, aus dem die Erzählerin je nach Bedarf die entsprechenden Schubladen herauszieht, um ihre Geschichte vorantreiben und gleichzeitig vorsichtig abrunden zu können". The house is a microcosm which Brigitte Burmeister fully explores to make it mirror the history and society whose witness (or ironically; "der letzte Zeuge") she is.

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