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Penile Politics

Sexuality and America in Thomas Brussig's Novel *Helden wie wir*

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Abstract

The German reunification in 1990, a political and historical turning point, produced a literary vacuum, in which the younger generation of writers stood a chance of becoming accepted by a big readership. One of these newcomers is the East German Thomas Brussig. His novel *Helden wie wir* (*Heroes like us*) has since its publication in 1995 been acclaimed as one of the most important contemporary German novels. Recounting the German reunification from a sexual point of view, it tells the story of the pervert Klaus Uhltscht who brings down the Berlin Wall with his penis. Sexuality embodies the East German society's struggle between freedom and ideological bondage.

Helden wie wir also deals with the relationship between Germany and the United States. We see today's United States as a sanctuary and mainstay for Germany's history. Brussig refers to the American dream, democracy and freedom, interweaving voices of American politicians like Ronald Reagan and using American culture as a foil for his protagonist Klaus.

In my analysis of *Helden wie wir* I focus on sexuality and America. In my analysis of sexuality I follow the references in the novel itself – Freudian theories, the East German sex therapist Siegfried Schnabel, and works by Christa Wolf. I also include works not explicitly mentioned in the novel but which yield further insight into Brussig's understanding of sexuality, Philip Roth's novel *Portnoy's Complaint* and Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex*. I try to explore sexuality further by working out special aspects, like the division of sexuality in East and West, the penis as symbol, and the language of sex. In the chapter on American ideas I include political statements of American presidents as a historical account of the reunification by the German historian Manfred Görtemaker. Besides other historical analyses and scholarly literature about the picture of America in German literature, the view of the Western world in Christa Wolf's works is juxtaposed with *Helden wie wir*. Furthermore, I include the depiction of America in Brussig's two other novels *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* and *Wasserfarben* in order to show a continuity in the author's perspective on this topic.

The conclusion unites the previous chapters and shows how sexuality and America together form a complex in *Helden wie wir*.

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Introduction

The German reunification in 1990, a political and historical turning point, produced a literary vacuum, in which the younger generation of writers stood a chance of becoming accepted by a big readership. At the moment, these authors, borne by the feelings of a new beginning after the fall of the wall, compete against the renowned and well-proven voices of traditional German literature. One of these newcomers is the East German Thomas Brussig. Born in 1965, Brussig was 24 years old when the wall came down. In hindsight he calls it the happiest moment in his life and has written a novel about the fall of the Berlin Wall. *Helden wie wir* (*Heroes like us*) was published in 1995. It has since then been acclaimed as one of the most important contemporary German novels. Recounting the German reunification from a sexual point of view, it tells the story of the pervert Klaus Uhltscht who brings down the Berlin Wall with his penis. Readers in East and West Germany as well as in many other countries, laugh and think about history. Even the *New York Times* found the book worthy of an extensive review in 1997.

Sexuality plays a prominent role in *Helden wie wir*. Klaus Uhltscht masturbates, rapes, molests, and indulges in all kinds of sexual perversions. In short, he is obsessed with sex. This personal obsession is, on a higher level, a metaphor for the political obsessions of West and East Germany. Furthermore, sexuality embodies the East German society's struggle between freedom and ideological bondage. Sexuality is far more than a mere adornment for the sex-starved reader but a thematic thread, which conflates perfectly with the political themes in the novel.

Helden wie wir also deals with the relationship between Germany and the United States. One of its remarkable features is that the story that forms the framework refers prominently to the United States. The first person-narrator Klaus tells his fictive account – that he initiated the opening of the Berlin wall – to an American journalist working for the *New York Times*. This raises the question as to whether America is still the foster father of the Germans. Brussig depicts German history as satirically distorted anti-history: the Germans are struggling with their national identity before and after the fall of the wall.

In the context of the political incidents of the last decade, the ideological chasm between the United States and large parts of Europe, including Germany, has become larger and larger. This tendency was exacerbated by the war against terrorism, promulgated by the United States after the September 11th attacks. Brussig's assessment of the US's role is interesting because he does not share the anti-American resentments and accusations of the European media. The daily bickering and bantering does not influence Brussig's depiction of America. In *Helden wie wir* we still see today's United States as a sanctuary and mainstay for Germany's history. Brussig refers to the American dream, democracy and freedom, interweaving voices of American politicians like Ronald Reagan and using American culture as a foil for his protagonist Klaus.

In my analysis of *Helden wie wir* I focus on sexuality and America. In the first chapter I analyze the complex sexuality in several ways. On the one hand I follow the references in the novel itself – Freudian theories, the East German sex therapist Siegfried Schnabel, and works by Christa Wolf. On the other hand, I pursue works not explicitly mentioned in the novel but which yield further insight into Brussig's understanding of

sexuality. I include Philip Roth's novel *Portnoy's Complaint* and Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex*. I try to explore sexuality further by working out special aspects, like the division of sexuality in East and West, the penis as symbol, and the language of sex. In the chapter on American ideas I distinguish between the personal narratives of Klaus and his interview partner Kitzelstein and a broader view of the political situation. Here I include political statements of American presidents as a historical account of the reunification by the German historian Manfred Görtemaker. Besides other historical analyses and scholarly literature about the picture of America in German literature, the view of the Western world in Christa Wolf's works is juxtaposed with *Helden wie wir*. Furthermore, I include the depiction of America in Brussig's two other novels *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* and *Wasserfarben* in order to show a continuity in the author's perspective on this topic.

The conclusion unites the previous chapters and shows how sexuality and America together form a complex in *Helden wie wir*.

Wie soll man ein Mann werden, wenn man sich sogar seiner selbstgekackten Scheiße schämen muß?

(Thomas Brussig, *Helden wie wir* 44).

I. Between Self-Realization and Self-Destruction – The Depiction of Sexuality

Helden wie wir brims with sexual images hurled into the reader's face. The novel's perverse protagonist Klaus is a rich source of shocking utterances vacillating between uncouth and untamed, obscene and obsequious, impish and irritating. Why did Thomas Brussig choose such a crude and unvarnished depiction of sexuality? Why did he opt for the pervert Klaus as a case history that portrays and mirrors the events of the fall of the Berlin wall and the period prior to it?

The depiction of Klaus' deviated sexuality serves several purposes. Klaus as individual case is a sexually hapless personality who lapses into a pathological deviation during his adolescence; he is simultaneously the symbol of a historical hero, vanquishing the foundering GDR and its outmoded values. Thus Brussig conflates private and public sexuality into one person: "Die politische Ereignisgeschichte des Mauerfalls wird zur intimen Geschichte des eigenen Geschlechtsorgans" (Kuhnau 199). The interplay of both aspects and the transition from the child oppressed in his childhood (private) to the perverted hero who initiates the fall of the wall (public) is the greater share of the novel's content. Klaus experiences public incidents on the level of personal intimacy and personal intimacy as a public political expression; Brussig interchanges the roles.

When Klaus is young the moral values of the public sphere overwhelm him and distort his psyche. Later, as the perverted grown-up, he strikes back and imposes his private obsessions onto the public sphere, thus triggering the reunification. Brussig

clearly shows that these two areas interact with each other and become inseparable, an amalgamation of the private and the public. While conjoining the private and the public, Klaus's sexuality seesaws between self-realization and self-destruction. Klaus constantly lurches between these two poles, on the one hand virility and manhood and on the other hand emasculated frailty and his existence as a loser.

The main stylistic mode of *Helden wie wir* is satire, which holds the sexuality complex together and endows it with literary zest. Every sexual action or thought is accompanied by a satirical perspective. Does this satirical contortion mean that the reader is not supposed to take anything seriously in this novel? Is everything derision and mockery, irony and jeer, meant to make us laugh and nothing more? Hidden behind the rambunctious obscenity which seems to drown the whole novel there is a subtle web telling us more about the hidden face of sexuality. Brussig himself gives hints to the reader where to look for origins for his sexual model Klaus. There is Sigmund Freud as well as the GDR physician and sex adviser Siegfried Schnabel with his standard work *Mann und Frau intim*, a sex digest from the 1970s. Not explicitly mentioned in the novel but indispensable for a critical view is Philip Roth's novel *Portnoy's Complaint*. Roth's book, also based on Freudian ideas and depicting obscenity and perversions, is surprisingly similar to Brussig's novel. Roth becomes the creative source according to which Brussig shapes his own novel. *Helden wie wir* also incorporates many traditional concepts of sexuality, partly going back to the old Greeks, the Renaissance, and the 19th century.

I.1. The Father of all Perversions – Sigmund Freud meets Thomas Brussig

Sigmund Freud is repeatedly cited in *Helden wie wir*. Brussig alludes to and quotes from Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, belonging to the early work of the psychoanalyst.¹ Comprising Freud's ideas about libido, infantile sexuality, childhood, parental complexes, and sexual deviations, they are the core of the Freudian psychoanalytic model.

Klaus is mainly interested in Freud's description and explanations of perversions. He envisages a future publication of his own, therein enhancing Freud's findings and conflating them with other currents like communism: "mit der Genialität eines Einsteins werde ich Freuds Forschungsgegenstand und Lenins Vermächtnis verschmelzen" (248).

The narrative situation in *Helden wie wir* is reminiscent of this classical therapist-patient relationship. Freud's patients first took a seat on the psychoanalyst's couch and then started telling the story of their life, thereby slowly breaking through to the core of their problematic psychical constitution. Although Klaus is talking to Mr. Kitzelstein, an American journalist, one can easily envision the protagonist as the patient unburdening his soul to his psychoanalyst. Albeit Brussig says nothing explicit about Mr. Kitzelstein or the alleged therapeutic function he could serve, we know that Klaus gives an oral account, thus strengthening the notion of a patient-therapist relationship.

Freud contends that the libido, the basic sexual power existing in every human being, rules our life. This primordial and elementary power can manifest itself in various ways. It can be used to perform sexual intercourse, but it can also be sublimated into the energy that creates works of art and invention. Sexuality does not only ensure the

¹ The first edition of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* appeared in 1905.

continuation of our species, it is responsible for the development of human culture. The absolute perfection of such a culture are works of literature, music, and the representational arts. However, there are many other possibilities for cultural expressions. It depends on the individual's environment and his internal settings, which way he or she will find relief from libidinal tension. The sexual act is the foremost goal of the libidinal power. In performing sex a person can temporarily mitigate his or her drive and enjoy distraction. For some people, however, it is not possible to unleash their drives and rid their libido pressure for the moment. Due to flaws in child rearing, certain individuals are not able to live a healthy sexuality. Freud's model focuses mainly on childhood experiences. A person's behavior can be explained through the educational phase of childhood. However, Freud also allows for an innate, inherited predisposition to one form or another of libidinal expression that transcend parental influences. Nevertheless, childhood remains the strongest influence on a human being. If the sexual energy of a child can not be directed into orderly directions through adolescence or if libidinal drives become suppressed, the libido will find another way to express itself. This explains sexual deviations. Wrongly channeled, the libido power becomes a wrong behavioral pattern, which is called perversion². This Freudian perspective pervades *Helden wie wir*.

Klaus Uhltscht is a profoundly suppressed character. He is under his mother's incessant surveillance and can hardly find ways to shield himself. The overly possessive and ruling mother figure dominates Klaus' entire youth. As state inspector for hygiene she represents a 'clean' character. 'Clean' can be seen in different aspects. First, there is physical cleanliness. Misses Uhltscht checks children for lice, a task that gives her much

² These deviational patterns, of course, have to exceed a certain degree to be real perversions. Otherwise they are to be classified as behavioral abnormalities.

happiness. Cleaning, that is disposing of irritating elements which do not fit the norm, is her life's task. Her desire for hygiene culminates in her attitudes toward her son's fecal matter: "Da lag ich dann, streckte ihr mein Arschloch entgegen, und sie putzte es ab – so gründlich, als ob es ihr eigenes wäre" (24). This is, of course not unusual for a mother, except for the fact that at this juncture her son is 19 years old. Klaus's dependence on his mother goes beyond his adolescence because the moral and psychological fetters his mother has applied are so strong. As the anus scene shows, he literally surrenders himself to his omnipotent mother.

It is remarkable that Klaus' mother is a physician. It is not only because of the aforementioned hygiene aspect. She is the robotic and ideologically clean citizen who attempts to pass on her needs for sterility to her son. Looking into Brussig's own biography gives us no clues. Neither of his parents is a physician nor any other member of the upper stratum. However, the medical profession's systematic mapping of anatomical and physiological features turns the human being into an object whose functions are predictable. Dictatorships have often been interested in medical research in order to control their citizens or enemies. Josef Mengele, the so-called "Angel of Death", is an inglorious example for the national socialist medicine. Brussig does not go that far. His physicians do not perform perverse experiments but are still devilish figures.³ As a doctor, Klaus' mother can analyze her son with her knowledge. Like her husband who is also trained in controlling other people, she is a spy looking for digressive behavior.⁴

³ They still violate the Hippocratic oath as we can see when some physicians try to save the life of the GDR's political leader Erich Honecker. Here they misuse Klaus as blood donor and nearly kill him.

⁴ Klaus's father works for the Stasi, the GDR's secret service well known for its relentless and ruthless methods of investigation.

Freud was dedicated to ameliorating and finally curing his patients' conditions. The systematic analysis of the human psyche propounded in his works serves this purpose. Klaus' mother wants to help and improve her patients' life, too. The irony is that she is completely oblivious to what is going awry with her son. She should be able to discern her son's misery. But she is blind to it and only contributes to the exacerbation of his perversions. The Hippocratic oath degenerates into a farce. The sex pervert cannot be cured by subservient doctors like his mother. There is no Freudian couch in Klaus' family, which would grant security from the ideology of the state and enable a sexually salutary development in the child.

Klaus' servility prevents him from becoming independent. He is not allowed to establish a life of his own. Being at his mother's mercy is easy but does not allow a sound development of his character. Therefore Klaus lapses into mental delusions and perversions. His inherent libidinal drive in adolescence that makes him, among other things, pursue sexual experiences, becomes more and more contorted in the course of time.

Sigmund Freud regards it as necessary for a child to separate from his parents not only for the child's sake but also for the benefit of the whole society:

Society must defend itself against the danger that the interests which it needs for the establishment of higher social units may be swallowed up by the family: and for this reason, in the case of every individual, but in particular of adolescent boys, it seeks by all possible means to loosen their connection with their family... (Freud 91)

A home in which parental domination and subjugation take the place of consensual dialogue and suffocate the child's physical or psychical movement does not

breed successful social subjects. Freud mainly propounds theories about the individual. He scarcely elaborates on the repercussions for the society. However, he was not oblivious to the intertwining of the private side (family, individual) and the society (public sphere). For Freud the higher social unit, the “state”, depends on the lower, that is to say the more intimate and smaller unit “family”. For people to live together in a social system of millions of people both systems, individual and public, have to work together. A state in whose borders only manipulated and ideologically distorted people are raised is doomed to failure.

Brussig goes in his novel beyond the Freudian stance. He always keeps the reader aware of the social consequences of one’s behavior. Klaus’ misbehavior as an individual always has unwanted repercussions: “Kaum habe ich meinen Schwanz aus einer Möse gezogen, werden Resozialisierungsmaßnahmen erforderlich” (Brussig, *Helden* 143).

The protagonist’s first craven sexual attempts turn out to burden the public medical system. His unenlightened understanding of procreation and sexuality leads to the contraction of a venereal disease. Totally unprepared for his first intercourse, Klaus feels shame and is not able to assess his situation. There seem to be only two possible ways to live sexuality: Either one has to suppress one’s sexuality and thereby comply with public moral dictates or live sexually in a radical and uncontrolled way. Klaus vacillates between these poles, but neither side grants him sustainable fulfillment. Although Klaus acts as an individual, setting himself apart in his sexual fantasies from other people, his whole sexuality turns out to be a matter of public attention. His masturbation hideout in the bathroom draws his mother’s attention. In the group masturbation scene at the soldiers’ preparation camp, Klaus and his sexuality become

part of a joint experience. When craving a woman, Klaus approaches the “Wurstfrau”, a frumpy and ugly hussy. Without a physical woman Klaus is doomed to lapse into autoerotic forms of love. However, even in masturbation a virtual ‘sex partner’ is necessary. The individual’s sexual drive needs an object to manifest itself. In the course of his paroxysmally increasing perversions Klaus envisions the NATO secretary general and the minister of the GDR state security Erich Mielke and makes them part of his sexual dreams. Although these images are not concrete and contrived, they assume the function of a sexual partner.

Klaus’ need for a sexual projection screen is undeniable. Brussig maintains the linkage between Klaus and other parts of society in the depiction of the protagonist’s sexual dreams. Freud, too, sees this need for linkage in sexuality. According to him, sexuality always needs a counterpart onto which wishes are projected. He calls this the sexual object (cf. 84). Lacking an appropriate object, the perverted person will lapse into narcissism in which the object becomes the person’s own ego. Falling in love with oneself, the narcissist resolves the problem of an absent sexual object. However, the pervert’s autoeroticism is not a satisfactory means to relief and long-lasting happiness.

Although Klaus’ psychology bears some resemblance to narcissism, he is not completely autoerotic. As a special clue, Brussig offers his protagonist a gigantic platform for his burning sexual drive in the very moment when Klaus seems nearly eaten up by his own perversions. The opening of the wall, the ‘penetration’ of the security fence at the Brandenburg gate, is the opportunity for the protagonist to unleash his virility. The sexuality of the final picture is evident: the unification of Germany is the penetration of the West German vulva-like gate with Klaus’ East German penis. This

image is not new. In many literary depictions from the Middle Ages to the early modern times one can find the male genitalia described as battering ram, penetrating and conquering the female vagina, which is seen as a fortress (Walsh 42-46).⁵ The picture shows the East German as the active, dominating part. The penis, symbol of manhood, belongs to the GDR side. Here Brussig's image is a multifaceted gender-bender. The formerly passive Klaus turns into an active and potent sex hero, and West Germany is the overcome woman. However, we should not forget the power of women in the novel. The influence of Klaus's mother is ubiquitous and omnipotent. The power of West Germany is also linked to mighty and impressive femininity emanating from the countless beautiful catalogue women whom Klaus envisages in his fantasies. With a satirical thunderclap, Brussig frees his protagonist from becoming a sexual narcissist by transforming him into a hero who successfully demonstrates his masculine power.

The satirical denouement of *Helden wie wir* challenges Sigmund Freud's approach of curing a narcissist. It is not couch therapy but a spontaneous act of sexual insurrection that produces the breakthrough. Klaus sets himself free and introduces a new époque for himself and for a whole nation. The fetters of the old generation are thrown away, realizing Freud's postulates for an independent individual in a sound society: "detachment from parental authority, a process that alone makes possible the opposition,

⁵ In the poem "Grates ago Veneri" we are told a story about an anonymous male who enforces sexual intercourse. The female partner revolts at first, but then successively acquiesces and finally enjoys the joy of sex. Stanza 4a, 4b, and 5a: "With overboldness I use force. She rampages with her sharp nails, tears my hair, forcefully repels my violence. She coils herself and entwines her knees to prevent the door of her maidenhead from being unbarred. / But at least my campaign makes progress; I win a triumph for my battle plan. I tighten by embraces our entwined bodies, I pin her arms, I implant hard kisses. In this way Venus' palace is unbarred. / Both gained satisfaction; my lover grew gentler and reproached me less ..." (Walsh 44). The picture Brussig harnesses in Klaus's penetrating the West is a traditional commonplace in love literature. However, the variation the motif undergoes in the context of the reunification story is quite resourceful. Normally, the male lover has to convince his female sex partner who is first coy and reticent but then thaws out. In *Helden wie wir* it is quite different. The lascivious FRG 'provokes' Klaus's penetration.

which is so important for the progress of civilization, between the new generation and the old” (93). Klaus no longer complies with his mother or with the state ideology. He acts only out of his spontaneous ideas, his own will.

For Sigmund Freud, the mother has the major influence on the child who is coming of age. But then she has to abandon that role and nurture the child's independence. “She [the mother] is only fulfilling her task in teaching the child to love. After all, he is meant to grow up into a strong and capable person with vigorous sexual needs and to accomplish during his life all the things that human beings are urged to do by their instincts” (89). In *Helden wie wir* the mother does not give Klaus the room to develop. Her possessive and controlling love provokes her son's sexual deviations. But Klaus stifles the protest that would allow him to become independent of the parental generation. He remains immature. Moreover, he cannot recognize the mother's mechanism of power by which she retains her sway over him. As long as he holds his mother in awe – “Sie war perfekt!” (25) - he cannot break away. Like Freud, Brussig's solution is to topple the outdated old order and replace it with something new, for the elders will not disappear of their own volition. Klaus must initiate his own deliverance.

In contrast to Sigmund Freud, who sees sexual deviations as subject to therapy, Brussig thus opens his protagonist an escape by turning Klaus' perversions into something productive. Klaus' perversions exert so much pressure on him that he finally finds the strength to initiate a historical feat. Unfortunately, Klaus cannot free himself from all of his unhealthy patterns. To some extent he remains a narcissistic monomaniac who strives to be the equal of heroes of the intellectual history, like Einstein und Freud.

Klaus's life of suffering may finally redound to his success, it remains a dangerous experiment and leaves the hero wounded for all times.

I do not intend to interpret of *Helden wie wir* solely through Freudian theory. Brussig refers to Freud by embedding him into his satirical cadences. We must not rigidly interpret a writer's book with a theoretical work that is 90 years older than the book itself. However, Brussig's characters are shaped along the lines of Freud's images. Brussig bestows depth on his novel by incorporating such background structures.

1.2. The Lustful Citizen - The Political Implication of Sexuality

So far, we have discussed the personal implications of Klaus' distorted sexuality to understand the mechanisms of individual power relationships. However, on a higher level the vicissitudes of sexuality symbolize the relationship between the state and its subjects becoming thereby a matter of politics.

Klaus Uhltscht is a very specialized and individual character. As first-person narrator, he stands at the center of the reader's attention. Other characters in the novel are always filtered through his view. The reader assumes him to be a singular case. It is hardly likely that the entire GDR population consists of characters like him. On the other hand, the hero classifies himself as part of the mass. He is one of the "heroes like us": "Ich war einer von uns" (107). However, Brussig's novel also attacks the passivity of the GDR citizens: "Sehen Sie sich die Ostdeutschen an, vor und nach dem Fall der Mauer. Vorher passiv, nachher passiv – wie sollen die je die Mauer umgeschmissen haben?" (319-320). As we have seen in the chapter on the influence of Freud, passivity is Klaus's

major characteristic when he deals with his mother. She is not only a mother figure but also the embodiment of the GDR's state ideology. Her power documents the inexorable mental violence by which people are politically trimmed and mutilated.

The citizen held in implacable ideological thralldom becomes dull and inert. Such torpid people become incapable of responsibly managing their own lives. They are pawns of a higher power, which uses them for its own purposes.

In interviews Brussig himself often said that one of the impulses to write *Helden wie wir* was his passionate wrath about the wall and its makers, the political ruling class of the GDR:

Allerdings ist für mich nicht die Stasi das Phänomen der DDR, sondern die Existenz der Mauer. Wie konnte eine Gesellschaft so lange die Existenz dieser Mauer akzeptieren? Das ist für mich die drängendste Frage. Bei Auschwitz konnte man ja immer sagen: Das habe ich nicht gewußt, aber bei der Mauer – die sahen ja alle. (qtd. in Walser 187)

In exposing the course of Klaus's abject sexuality, Brussig shows that the ideological manipulation of a person by state power will finally impinge on the state itself. The GDR rears creatures that seem at first glance dutifully to conform to the state's demands. But a government is absolutely dependent on a vital and productive citizenry. Obedient, mentally "impotent", and vacuous citizens hasten the state's decay. While Brussig does not explicitly name the causes of the downfall of the GDR, the reader knows that the weak and stale creatures he encounters in the soldier's training camp or at the little Stasi branch⁶ are not capable of backing up a doomed GDR regime.

⁶ the disguised post office

The political basic message of *Helden wie wir* is that the GDR is a gigantic institution of mass indoctrination. Whoever does not follow the paramount principles of ideological purity and constant righteous behavior will be stigmatized by the authorities. Whoever develops his or her own plans in pursuit of his or her inner wishes will be punished. Klaus' sexuality is a symbol for the attempt to establish his own burgeoning ideals. Marred and maimed by an almighty mother and a fiendish father, Klaus's psyche degenerates and falls ill. Although the reader cannot help but laugh at Klaus' clumsy and sick attempts to come to grips with his sexuality, one should not forget that the outcome for such a person is, after all, devastating. What remains is, in Brussig's view, a lackadaisical nation which is emasculated and incapacitated. When Klaus says "loslaufen müßt ihr selber" (319) the people of the GDR appear to be like a huge flock of sheep in need of help and advice at every turn (Zachau 387-395).

By portraying the pervert Klaus as the person who makes the fall of the wall possible, Brussig uses sexuality as representative for political power. The mentally maimed Klaus is so perverted that his very perversion unleashes his hidden power. Supported in the end by his gigantic penis, an outcome of his surgery, Klaus feels entitled to do something, that is to befuddle and numb the wall guards with his virile member and finally push open the gate. Tormented and bodily disfigured, he begins to understand what his parents and the state have done with him. He begins to see through the whole diabolic scheme of deliberately holding people like him in bondage.

Klaus's process of awareness is long and debilitating. Even when it is finally successful Klaus remains a lunatic. He is a megalomaniac who will presumably never be able to make up for his bad childhood experiences. His view is schizophrenic: Moments

of bright insight into the truth alternate with moments of overestimating his own capacities. Klaus is irreparably damaged, and so are the people of the former GDR. Brussig stated in an interview with the *Berliner Zeitung* that the odds for talking about the past are decreasing every day:

Helden wie wir ist aus einem Schmerz und einer Enttäuschung über die Nicht-Auseinandersetzung mit der DDR-Vergangenheit entstanden. Und mittlerweile bin ich zu der Überzeugung gelangt, daß es diese Auseinandersetzung nicht mehr geben wird. Ich finde das traurig, aber ich sehe keine reale Chance mehr. (Lambeck 6)

The literary historian Hannelore Scholz got to the heart of this in her reflection about the situation of the post-wall literature: “Das Dilemma der Ost- und Westdeutschen besteht ... darin, daß sie ihre Gegenwart verdrängen, keine Zukunft diskutieren, sondern sich in moralisierenden Debatten verlieren, die die Nachkriegsgeschichte beider Teile Deutschlands nicht differenziert genug berücksichtigen” (Scholz, *Unheimliche Suche* 18)

The damage cannot be redressed through disputation. A dialogue about what was wrong and about the mistakes committed in those days will remain impossible. This is a very pessimistic view masked by satire. However, the means of sexual satire gives Brussig the possibility to peer into the gaping abyss of ideological deformation and a whole nation perverted by its rulers. The crude and obscene sexuality enhance laughter and enables the reader to see a distance between himself and the historical incidents – a distance which has to be created artificially in the absence of a real-time one.

Brussig raises several political questions in *Helden wie wir*: Do we really have to become sick by a system, which is suppressing us until we are able to abolish it? Was this

degeneration really necessary? Was there not an easier way? The author leaves the answers to the reader's discretion.

I.3. The Master and His Adherer – Philip Roth and Thomas Brussig

A comparison of Philip Roth's novel *Portnoy's Complaint* and *Helden wie wir* reveals how important a literary ideal was for Brussig's second novel⁷. We will find a plethora of parallels in structure, style, and content in *Portnoy's Complaint* and Brussig's writing that help us to better understand the latter.

Roth recounts the story of Alexander Portnoy, an American Jew who develops a psychic complex during his childhood. Thanks to an obsessively manipulative and possessive mother he develops perverse ideas and ends up as an affluent, promiscuous bachelor, unable to sustain a long-lasting relationship. Eternal guilt, abundant sexual greed, and his unsolved Jewish identity make him lead an unsteady life in psychic pain.

Seeking redemption and relief, Portnoy tells the story of his life to the Freudian psychoanalyst Dr. Spielvogel. Portnoy directly addresses the reader as first-person narrator. Brussig's hero here speaks in the same way to the American journalist Mr. Kitzelstein. Both accounts, Klaus' and Portnoy's resemble confessions. Klaus Uhltscht vindicates his deed at the Berlin wall as a heroic feat and at the same moment unburdening his heart and his whole contorted life into the journalist's microphone.

Roth summarizes his protagonist's sexual complex in a fictive encyclopedia entry which prefaces the novel. "Portnoy's complaint" is a:

⁷ Thomas Brussig calls Philip Roth one of his formative literary fathers (Escherig 31)

... disorder in which strongly felt altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature. ... 'Acts of exhibitionism, voyeurism, fetishism, auto-eroticism ... are plentiful ... however, neither fantasy nor act issues in genuine sexual gratification ... (Roth, preface, no page)

Portnoy cannot find real satisfaction in love. Sexuality becomes a tiresome leisure time activity without enduring gratification effect. Portnoy cannot live monogamously. Every relationship with a woman leads to growing dissatisfaction and creates a pattern of abandonment and search for the next lover. The eternal guilt imposed by his mother and her pedagogical drill leaves Portnoy as a narcissistic and self-centered dandy with an insatiable longing for sexual satisfaction. Roth's preface could, with some caveats, also represent Klaus Uhltzsch. He, too, is unable to achieve satisfaction. Every attempt to make love leaves him psychically even more crippled: "Da habe ich das unglaubliche Kunststück fertiggebracht und allen Verteufelungen zum Trotz meinen verschüchterten Pinsel in einer traumhaften Möse untergebracht – und bin nicht *erlöst*?" (Brussig, *Helden* 137).

Frustrated attempts at redemption marks both novels with the same intensity. Both heroes suffer from a huge load of guilt resting upon their souls. Their inability to cope with this guilt in real life causes their sexual deviations. Their mothers did not teach them how to love. Real love is therefore unattainable for Alexander Portnoy as well as Klaus. The latter's relationship with Yvonne, his first real love, fails because he cannot align his sexual and emotional feelings to her. Seeing her only as a lovely and frail girl, he is shocked when she unveils her inclination toward masochism. Portnoy accounts for his own coldness the same way, absolutely conscious of what he lacks: "... it is necessary

that two currents of feeling be united: the tender affectionate feelings, and the sensuous feelings. And in many instances this just doesn't happen, sad to say. 'Where such men love they have no desire, and where they desire they cannot love'" (Roth 185, 186). Women are for both protagonists only sex objects, bluntly spoken fucking machines with vaginas and breasts. When it comes to emotions, both men, Alexander and Klaus, fail miserably.

Both protagonists, profoundly exhibitionist in their sexual predilection, are simultaneously terrified of public exposure and lead a double life wherein private and public are at war. Portnoy compulsively concocts fictive tabloid headlines which could expose his secret and embarrass him in the public eye: "ASS HUMAN OPP'Y COMMISH FOUND HEADLESS IN GO-GO GIRL'S APT ... ASS HUMAN OPP'Y COMMISH FLOGS DUMMY" (Roth 161, 175). Klaus Uhltzsch's imaginary BILD headlines resemble Portnoy's: "STASI-SCHERGE VERGING SICH AN DISSIDENTEN-TOCHTER ... NACH DEM STASI-FICK: SIE WOLLTE NICHT MEHR LEBEN!" (Brussig, *Helden* 236). The aforementioned juxtaposition of private and public in Klaus' life culminates with vehemence in the novel's headline passages and shows the attritional conflict in which the protagonist is trapped.

Both protagonists have mothers obsessed with compulsive cleanliness and extreme prudishness. Roth's mother figure is a homemaker, devoted to her overly hygienic apartment and oppressing her husband, an unsuccessful insurance agent: "... but where health and cleanliness are concerned, germs and bodily secretions, she will not spare herself and sacrifice others" (Roth 12). Portnoy conflates "bodily secretions" directly to his ejaculations, which he regularly shoots into socks or underneath the

bathroom ceiling. He is enthralled by masturbating in the lavatory, as is Klaus Uhltscht. They both celebrate their emerging sexual desire in secluded autoerotic masturbation sessions, most often in the locked bathroom which their mothers investigate. Klaus and Alexander vacillate between hatred and love, attraction and repulsion for their mothers. Later, Portnoy is able to distance himself when he achieves a professional career and moves out of his parents' house. He does not care about his mother anymore. The seesawing hatred-love relationship has come to an indifferent standstill. With indolence and indifference, the grown-up Alexander rebuffs all of his mother's overtures. With Klaus, however, we do not really know how the relationship with his mother will proceed. Before committing his historical feat at the Berlin wall we see his mother visiting him in the hospital. Although not claiming his independence from her, it becomes obvious that something in the mother-son relationship has changed. The mother is no longer able to ignore her son's sexuality. What she attempted to oppress with an adamant education of asexuality for such a long time, now returns with a vengeance. The image of the gigantic penis is Klaus's rebellion against the suppression of his sexuality that his mother so vigorously inflicted on him. The mother flees screaming from Klaus. He seems to have vanquished her. Alexander Portnoy and Klaus Uhltscht unwittingly wage a war against the parental generation and finally prevail in the fight for separation and independence.

The stylistic and more formal features of *Helden wie wir* and *Portnoy's Complaint* will reveal several small parallels between the two works.

Roth liberally uses Yiddish words in his novel to make the protagonist's ethnicity descent clear. One of the novel's supporting characters is called Mr. Kitzel, a presumably Jewish

name. Roth does not provide the reader with information about him, but the name alludes to the German word for clitoris⁸. It cannot be a coincidence that Brussig uses the name Kitzelstein for his therapist-like journalist. It reflects both the state of being Jewish and sexuality. The historical dimension in Roth's work, the American-Jewish identity crisis⁹, is replaced in Brussig's novel by the reunification story. *Helden wie wir* does not use Jewish themes. However, it is conspicuous that both novels portray a sex-struggling individual whose vita becomes connected to a historic-political problem on a higher level.

Brussig picks up on little details in Roth's novel and reclaims them in his own novel, although he embroiders and remodels them. Alexander Portnoy seeks relief in his perversions by imagining that there must be people who are even more perverted than him: "There are people who fuck chickens!" (Roth 126). *Helden wie wir* adapts this idea, surpassing Roth in vulgarity: "Vielleicht kann ich mich noch besser in den Gegner hineinversetzen ..., wenn ich selbst ein Hühnerficker werde? ... Mit diesen Überlegungen kaufte ich mir zum Feierabend einen ganzen Broiler, den ich zu Hause und ohne Rücksprache mit meiner Dienststelle sexuell mißbrauchte" (239). Alexander's father suffers from constipation; Brussig intensifies this picture and lets Klaus' father die by literally digesting himself into a huge piece of feces.

In neither novel does the narrator's interlocutor have his say. Mr. Kitzelstein as well as Dr. Spielvogel remain silent and listen to the sexual escapades of their visitors.¹⁰

⁸ The word is 'Kitzler'.

⁹ In the last chapter of *Portnoy's Complaint* the protagonist travels to Israel in order to find out more about his own identity. In the course of his journey, the question is posed if Jews should live in the Holy Land or America. Here his individual identity-crisis is seen as the identity-crisis of a whole people. Portnoy's sex problem has gone – so to speak – political.

¹⁰ However, Dr. Spielvogel says one short sentence at the end of *Portnoy's Complaint*. He has the final say but this is rather a surprising punchline at the very end than an equal dialogue between him and Alexander.

In both novels the narrators conduct a monologue addressing their mute monologue partners by name to perpetuate the semblance of conversational vivacity. The silent interlocutor thus represents the personification of the reader's own curiosity or even voyeurism. One becomes witness to abnormal sexual activities, in Roth's case only destined for the ears of Dr. Spielvogel. Klaus Uhltscht, however, wants nothing more than to garner a huge audience's attention. His exhibitionistic trait is even stronger than Alexander Portnoy's who flaunts his life only in front of his therapist.

Eventually, Roth's style is more complex and more subtle whereas Brussig works more bluntly. Roth has incorporated the whole complexity of the Freudian philosophy into his protagonist. Every action, every statement in the novel breathes this spirit. Brussig does not offer such a web of intricate entanglement. He prefers to string together different sources and ideas like little beads on a necklace. Roth's stylistic work resembles rather a woven carpet in which different leitmotifs constantly surface like thin glittering threads.

However, Philip Roth's novel is for Thomas Brussig a reservoir full of strong pictures and ideas. Despite the astonishing similarity between the two works, Brussig does not merely copy Roth's features. He gives his novel a genuine 'Brussig' touch by interlacing his own life experiences as an unsuccessful GDR citizen. What characterizes Brussig's and Roth's novels is their rich, rough, and forthright portrayal of sexual obsessions, presented with keen, audacious, and gloating shamelessness.

I.4. East and West – Mapping Sexuality

Sexuality in *Helden wie wir* is both personal and political. The political division of the world into communism and capitalism is a sexual division as well. Klaus perceives the western world as sexually lascivious and debauched, whereas his own communistic world is grey and prudish. The colored map Klaus has to study in school separates countries into blue (capitalism) and red (communism). These two spheres reflect their sexual differences as well.

From the East German vantage point, unlimited sex is a hallmark of the Western world. Sexuality in the West represents freedom from the encroachment of the state. The sexual revolution in West Germany triggered by the '68 student revolts encouraged a social climate in which free love and sex between unmarried people was condoned by the older generation and no longer subjected to legal punishment. The immediate sense of individualism can be lived through sexuality. It is more than the joy of sexual pleasure. It is also a symbol for the opportunity to express one's inner propensities.

In *Helden wie wir* printed material carries the spirit of unlimited sexuality to the East. The tabloid BILD embodies sexual debauchery coupled with a dedicated credo of investigative journalism. It mesmerizes Klaus with its ability to drag sexual secrets into the public. He, oppressed and sex-starved, is befuddled by the bluntly mocking headlines of BILD. The first hint from Klaus about his impression of West German sexuality is therefore a BILD story: "SEX-SKANDAL BEI DER POLIZEI! Schrecklich!" (15). In Klaus' environment it would be sacrilege to juxtapose publicly condemned sexuality with

the police, a mighty state organ. This boldness seems to be possible only in West Germany.

Klaus is attracted by West Germany's free and unlimited access to sexuality. His fantasy is that West Berlin's streets are full of scantily clad women. Their beauty is stainless and their sexual drive high. Squatting on a subway shaft, Klaus' sexual pipe dreams mushroom:

Ich verbrachte Stunden auf den Lüftungsgittern der U-Bahn-Schächte, und jedesmal, wenn ich eine U-Bahn unter mir rumpeln hörte, warf ich einen lechzenden Blick auf die Quelle-Frauen meiner vier herausgerissenen Doppelseiten und wußte, daß die U-Bahn ... voll von solchen Frauen ist (173).

Here we see the negative effects of this alleged 'freedom'. Klaus's picture of Western reality becomes totally distorted from his avid reading of the catalogue of the mail order company 'Quelle'. At this point the protagonist is oblivious to the reality that the Western world cannot be understood solely from its advertisements. The only point of advertisement is to sell products. Reality is irrelevant to advertising. Advertisement can lie as long as it raises sales. Klaus has never been able to visit West Germany. He has never seen it or its women with his own eyes. He has an extremely strong picture of the Western world in the form of his catalogue clippings. The irony is that the fake picture of the advertisement cannot be juxtaposed to a corrective real-life impression. There is no chance for Klaus to balance both, reality and fiction. The blind spot "subway women" is filled with a forged picture. In his mind, Klaus idolizes and adorns these images of West German women more and more.

In the absence of catalogue females the protagonist has to find a surrogate in his own home country. Unfortunately, the East German female counterparts' sex appeal is meager. Klaus has his first major erection while watching an East German TV show with the crooner Dagmar Frederic. Later he has to be satisfied with the "Lustzentrum der Warschauer Paktstaaten" (186), a ramshackle dance establishment in a squalid backstreet of East Berlin, where he picks up the "Wurstfrau" hoping for a sexual encounter. East German sexual life is just a poor copy of the real McCoy, which awaits him in the Federal Republic of Germany, the western paradise.

Klaus's imagination works according to the advertisements he has consumed. He engages in reducing female features to the absolute essentials. Like a successful advertisement tries to flesh out one feature with which the product can be safely distinguished from other rivaling products, Klaus reduces the ultimate distinction between West and East to one little spot – "der sagenumwobene G-Punkt" (76). Klaus' sexual discernment works because he mystifies sexuality¹¹.

In *Helden wie wir* the G-spot only exists in the West German sex digest. It is not mentioned in its East German counterpart, Siegfried Schnabel's *Mann und Frau intim*. The G-spot becomes the fetish of Klaus's fantasies. Shrouded in the mysterious rumor that this spot is capable of providing infinite sexual satisfaction, it is the minute but crucial distinction between the two Germanys. However, sexual and economical success can be brought together here: not only does West Germany possess the secret formula for creating wealth and affluence, it is also privy to the most sacrosanct secrets of love. The

¹¹ The same principle can also be found on a higher level. The countless legends and myths with which the GDR regime attempted to induce a comrade spirit among its citizens are an important part of *Helden wie wir*, e.g. the legend of the little trumpeter. Klaus' imagination works in the same way. He creates his own legends and myth which grow later into severe mental aberrations.

G-spot is – so to speak – the Holy Grail of sexuality. It becomes the philosopher's stone, the answer to the riddle of why East and West Germany developed so differently.

So far we have seen that Western values and products are a catalyst for Klaus' perversions. Klaus is here a victim of his fantasies. In other passages, however, it becomes obvious that he is able to see through the whole illusion of perfect lust and happiness. Klaus surmises that the legend of unlimited sex in West Germany cannot be everything: "Als ob Sex nur durch junge, gutgebaute und oft abfotografierte Stars verkörpert wird, als ob erst Standwagen und Miniröckchen daran erinnern, daß es SexSexSex gibt ... " (59).

This process of recognition takes place while Klaus is narrating his story. It is therefore probable that he understands the mechanisms from the vantage point of the post-wall Klaus who is recounting his life. Brussig does not meticulously differentiate between the reported time and the time of reporting. Both levels melt into one another and are stylistically welded together. It is significant that the protagonist understands the principles behind the Western sex industry. He even understands the double moral, that comes from selling sex: "Die Aufgeile ist pausenlos am Trommeln, aber auf Sextourismus steht Naserümpfen" (246).

The clichés of the Western porn industry and of Eastern prudishness symbolize the difference between these governmental forms. In fact, there is some truth behind these depictions. Before 1989, pornography was not part of public discourse in East Germany, whereas porn shops like 'Beate Uhse' were mushrooming and flourishing in the West. The GDR authorities saw in Western porn marketing the danger that "solche Produkte westlicher 'Unkultur' an sich gesellschafts- und damit auch

persönlichkeitsschädigend sein müßten” (Weller 87). However, although the sex industry attempted to sexually conquer the East German ‘wasteland’ the success was moderate: “... DDR-Bürger gehen mit ihrer Sexualität souverän um und sehen der Pornowelle gelassen entgegen” (Weller 89). Sex-starved East Germans are Brussig’s literary hyperbole, aggravating the inner conflict between Klaus and his sexual perversions. Brussig reduces the depiction of the two German nations in *Helden wie wir* to the question of how sexuality is practiced in the GDR and the FRG. The ‘sexualization’ of two nations is – negatively seen – an unjustified simplification of the political reality. Brussig does not portray the political features of West Germany, nor does he talk about the governmental system. One reason is that when *Helden wie wir* appeared in 1995 the political situation had already been decided in favor of West Germany. The unification entailed the imposition of the West German democracy onto East German territory. Brussig does not regard it as necessary to portray West Germany. It seems him to be self-evident. However, the main reason he reduces two political systems in the mirror of sexuality is his satirical approach. To arouse laughter it is necessary to simplify the topic to expose it in its ridiculousness. The sexual mapping fulfills this purpose excellently. It makes the reader laugh and is at the same time part of Klaus’ perverted world view.

The flight into perversions is for Klaus a means of setting himself apart from the sexual restraints of the prudish regime. In his way of becoming – so to speak – a professional pervert, Klaus wants to develop a system in which every citizen can indulge in perversions and escape the narrow-minded sexual morality: “Mr. Kitzelstein, ich lege Wert auf die Feststellung, daß ich pervers wurde, um dem Sozialismus zum Sieg zu verhelfen” (247). Klaus is confused. His notion of socialism remains diffuse. It is,

however, a fact, that he brings together East and West in his alleged research on perversions. The utilization of knowledge for the masses is doubtlessly a major socialist goal¹². But this will not satisfy Klaus. He plans to found a huge porn trust on a commercial model: “So wie Hollywood die Hauptstadt der Unterhaltungsindustrie ist, wird Berlin die Metropole der Perversionsindustrie. ... Ich werde der hiesige Studioboß, und wenn mein Wirtschaftszweig nur ein Zehntel des Umsatzes von Hollywood macht, bekomme ich den Nobelpreis für Wirtschaft” (249).

Klaus’s altruistic goal of spreading perversions to the masses for their liberation is contrary to capitalism’s fundamental goal. Capitalism’s basic goal is to maximize profit. As we have seen in the ‘Quelle’ catalogue, capitalism creates flawless products to lure customers. Everything natural has to be varnished in the marketing departments. The women portrayed in the catalogue are not meant to encourage sexual freedom but to increase sales. Thus, the perversions in Klaus’ mind have their counterparts in capitalism’s perversions.

Although all sexual power seems to emanate from Klaus, the dominating male figure in the book, most of the female characters are surreptitiously powerful. Klaus himself is obedient toward most of the women he meets in his life. They gain power over him because he needs them to boost his sexual drive. Until Klaus is in the aggravated final phase of his perversion in which he can replace females as sexual objects with GDR politicians like Erich Mielke¹³, he remains dependent on females most of the time. Not only does his mother have power over him but also characters like Dagmar Frederic, Katharina Witt, Jutta Müller or Martina Page. He needs these women to incite his

¹² Socialist theory maintains that innovations shall advance the welfare of all people.

¹³ Compare the masturbation monologue (Brussig, *Helden* 196-198)

fantasies. Without them he cannot achieve an orgasm. Here lies the power of women in *Helden wie wir*: they unleash the protagonist's sexual power, usually without knowing it. Martina Page is an exception. She seduces Klaus once, but denies him further access to sexual satisfaction. It is astonishing that Klaus' final feat, the opening of the wall, is triggered by a female character as well. On a podium close to the Berlin wall he seems to discern Jutta Müller. Embarrassed about that she, a sports trainer, is giving a speech on politics he ends up uncovering his penis. As we are told later, it was not Jutta Müller behind the lectern but the East German author Christa Wolf. However, the fact, that females trigger the protagonist's sexual deeds, pervades the entire novel. Women are the power behind the throne. In East Germany they are mostly the mother figures in their function as founders and perpetuators of the socialistic ideas; in West Germany they are the sweet, oversexed vamps. The mapping of sexuality shows therefore a major difference in how females appear in the two political worlds. However, the unifying parallel is that women from both sides of the wall impinge onto Klaus' life.

Brussig loves to amalgamate fiction and reality in his novel. Besides fictitious characters, the reader encounters many real people. The novel thereby acquires a touch of live history. One of these real-world characters and also a rich source of allusions in *Helden wie wir* is Christa Wolf. Her works deal with the question of the divided Germany and the question of an East German and West German identity. In her novel *Der geteilte Himmel* she describes the fate of Rita, an East German woman, whose boyfriend Manfred flees to West Berlin in the early 1960s to build a better career. He invites her to follow him and leave the GDR. Rita, however, is not enthralled by the capitalistic charm of the West zone. Her impressions are rather unspectacular: Grey stonewalls and a dull street

life mark West Berlin. There is no incentive for Rita either to stay or to go to the West. Yet she realizes that West Berlin is much richer than the Eastern part. The abundance of products in the stores exceeds the East's supply by far, and yet "... läuft alles das doch auf Essen und Trinken und Sichkleiden und Schlafen hinaus" (237). Wolf maintains that the differences between East and West are only materialistic ones. The life of all people is in the end the same, East and West Germans alike. In *Der geteilte Himmel* the tensions are not powerful enough to justify reunification¹⁴. In *Helden wie wir* the opposite is the case. The marked differences between East and West expedite Klaus' sexual degeneration and lead to his development into a historical hero.

Another major source for *Helden wie wir* is the East German sex advisor Siegfried Schnabel and his standard work *Mann und Frau intim*, frequently alluded to in the text. Schnabel's digest of sexuality first appeared in 1970 and was subsequently reprinted in countless editions. It was the East German sexual primer for adults, comparable to Oswald Kolle's educational films in West Germany. *Mann und Frau intim* encourages a new openness to enjoying sex and seeks to abolish condemnation of fleshliness. However, the technical parlance gives the book a very wooden tone and content for the modern reader. Schnabel's view is that of a moderate sexual therapist. In making sex, his advice is to keep the golden mean:

Keineswegs ist die Sexualität das Wichtigste in unserem Leben. Läßt man ihr völlig freien Lauf, dann überwuchert sie leicht andere Inhalte unseres Daseins und bringt mehr Nachteile als Freuden. Engt man sie jedoch zu sehr ein oder belastet man sie mit Vorstellungen von ihrer Sündhaftigkeit, so verkümmert sie, und wir berauben uns vieler schöner, ja erhebender Erlebnisse. (9)

¹⁴ Wolf wrote her novel after the erection of the wall. In those days people began to accept a divided Germany expressed in the physical separation by concrete. Brussig's standpoint marks the other end, the collapse of the enforced separation. Of course, when Wolf wrote her novel, there was no flourishing sex industry. However, sexuality is not even touched upon in *Der geteilte Himmel*.

The categorical language of scientific structuralism shines through in this quotation. There is either abundant and unbridled sexual lust or the withering and lust-killing prudishness of sexual suppression. Yet Brussig's protagonist does not fit into this scheme. His insatiable drive follows from the way his mother encouraged him to suppress his sexuality. Brussig swaps and mingles Schnabel's two theses. His hero does therefore not fit into the standardized GDR mentality. He is not one of those who could possibly obtain help from Schnabel's advices. Although Klaus is marked as "einer von ihnen," (Hww 315) his mentality is expressly different. His deviations have grown so strong and overpowering that mitigation is impossible.

Brussig does not attack Schnabel and his digest personally. It is rather a symbol for socialism's attempts to cure its citizens' problems: Those who feel estranged by an ideological conflict – here represented in a sexual conflict – can be brought back to "normality" with official advice. It is obvious that Klaus' development cannot be handled and categorized by the sex advisor¹⁵.

In a nutshell, political deviation has taken place in the heads of the citizens of the GDR, a deviation that can no longer be oppressed by the regime. That is why Klaus mentions an extension to Schnabel's book. For him, this work has to be supplemented in order to chronicle the latest changes:

Bereits meine allererste Perversion war zu heftig für das 9. Kapitel! Siegfried Schnabel wird ein 11. Kapitel schreiben müssen! Dessen erster Satz wird lauten: 'Die Erscheinungen, mit denen wir

¹⁵ In this context it is striking that *Mann und Frau intim* has never been changed from the first until the 16th edition 1984 (I can only tell so far because this is the newest edition I could obtain). More than a decade without changes bears witness to an ideological rigidity. There was no inclusion of most recent medical knowledge whatsoever.

uns in diesem Kapitel beschäftigen, müssen seit kurzem – und zwar seit der Ära Klaus Uhltscht – wieder als ‚pervers‘ bezeichnet werden’. (Brussig, *Helden* 246)¹⁶

Klaus is a catalyst for changes. He, the excoriated individual who has undergone pain, from education¹⁷ and personal experiences¹⁸ to physical damage, suddenly outgrows his limitations and turns the well-proven categorizations upside down: Schnabel’s book is in his view worthless without the required supplements to be contributed by Klaus himself. Klaus has added a new color to the map of blue and red – a color that is destined to heal the separation between blue and red and to create a combination color – the united Germany.

Do we have to take Brussig’s assertion in *Helden wie wir* literally that there was no free sex life in the GDR? The author himself repudiates this picture in his other novels which express a much more relaxed and natural handling of sex. In Brussig’s first novel *Wasserfarben* the protagonist Anton Glienicke lives through a grey and unspectacular youth. Typical for his age – he turns 18 in the novel - Anton has a girlfriend. The relationship with her fails because her parents deem him to be a loser and therefore interfere in their daughter’s relationship, finally destroying it. Anton cannot find another girl whom he can trust and build a relationship with. The typical pubescent need for sexual self-experience does not glow in him. He therefore does not like friends “die bei jedem Weiberarsch losjohlen” (32). Anton’s professional development is sullied by the state powers but this does not directly impinge on his sexual attitude. Anton is lonely and therefore falls into a typical identity crisis during puberty: “Ich komme mit meinem

¹⁶ The 10th chapter of *Mann und Frau intim* is dealing with homosexuality. That is why Klaus is talking about annexing an 11th chapter which can enhance the 9th.

¹⁷ Parents, training camp, Stasi collaboration

¹⁸ especially the failed love affairs with Martina Page, the “Wurstfrau” and Yvonne

Sexualleben wirklich nicht klar. ... Mit meiner Sexualität ist es wahrscheinlich wirklich nicht normal" (77). Anton is sexually frustrated, but he is neither oversexed nor does he lapse into perversions. However, *Wasserfarben* already suggests a pattern of sexual deviation. Anton's failure to cope with his sex life is the core idea for the character Klaus Uhltzsch. Yet, Anton's sexual discontentment is not necessarily a consequence of life in a communist country.

In Brussig's third novel *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* he openly and unreservedly writes of sexuality in young people. The 17 year old Mario, a supporting character, falls in love with a freelance artist in her mid-twenties. Nobody criticizes their relationship, even when they are expecting a child. The protagonist Michael Kuppisch woos and wins a girl from the neighborhood, Miriam. Sex between them is the normal consequence. *Helden wie wir* stands alone in its crass depiction of sexuality, unrelated to Brussig's other novels.

I.5. The Penis as Epitome of Power

Ideas about sex and male fantasies dominate *Helden wie wir*. The author provides scant insight into the psychical structure of his female characters. Brussig himself admitted his inability to develop elaborated female characters: "Ich könnte auch keine Frau beschreiben." ("Herr Brussig, was halten Sie von Nostalgie?")

Even if one takes the author's utterance with a grain of salt, one cannot ignore that the novel's symbolic language is dominated by masculine fantasies. Women are always

described through the lens of male lechery¹⁹. Klaus' penis seems to be the scepter of reunification history. Where does this picture come from? A view back into the history of the classification of sexes and their roles will bring some clarity.

There have been two main theories in understanding the sexual differences between a man and a woman – the one sex theory and the two sex theory.²⁰ According to the one sex theory man and woman are made from the same flesh substance. The primordial picture is the man,²¹ the woman is seen as his unfinished counterpart²². This theory postulates that male and female are two representations of the same concept – the human being. The major differences in the configuration of their sexual organs are explained as inversion. By virtually inverting the vagina it could assume the shape of a penis. The ovaries resembled the male testicles. The female sexual apparatus is seen as the negative version of the male's. Yet while man and woman are deemed to be almost the same, the woman is an imperfect copy of the man. Of course, scientists like Aristotle and Galen did know the actual differences between a man and a woman. Males have a penis, women do not. Scientists emphasized the shared origin over differences in behavior or mentality. There was no special gender allocation. What made a man a man were single traits like sperm production. However, there is no whole picture of manliness. Nevertheless, the male was seen to be a higher perfection of the human being. Scientists from the antiquity until the Renaissance deduced male superiority from the higher temperature of their body fluids.

¹⁹ Compare hereunto the passive power females gain over Klaus in the last preceding chapter.

²⁰ The following theoretical differentiation is based upon Thomas Laqueur's cultural history of sexuality, *Making Sex*.

²¹ In all anatomical depictions until the 18th/19th century a male body normally represents both sexes.

²² Substantiated by the genesis: The woman is made from man's flesh.

The two-sex theory emerged during the Enlightenment. The ratio-based medicine of this phase was mainly interested in a meticulous description of the human anatomy. The old system of the harmony of the body fluids fell into abeyance, replaced by detailed knowledge of the anatomical differences between man and woman. The medicine of those days did not focus on greater explanations of the function of the body but was obsessed with dissecting and chronicling its single components. Scientists then tried to deduce consequences from the different anatomical features. Phrenology maintained that the form of a human skull demonstrated mental faculties or character. Females were again the inferiors of evolution. Their brains were generally lighter and smaller than men's. Anatomical differences then suggested cultural ones. However, the one-sex theory was not totally absent in the 19th century. Both perspectives remained in existence. Although the two-sex theory was more popular, there was still room for its predecessor.²³

Both theories are germane to the depiction of sex in *Helden wie wir*. It is not that its author was expressly interested in the history of medicine. But rather that the imaginative worlds of both theories linger in an author of the late 20th century writing about sexuality.

I submit that *Helden wie wir* contains sexual attitudes from both theories. The reader of a satirical novel is aware that only a few things – if any – should be taken literally. Satire distorts and exaggerates. In Brussig's novel, sexuality is often not sexuality per se. The awakening of Klaus' mammoth penis is a metaphor for his development into a mature and responsible person who can be politically responsible.

²³ However, when the two-sex theory was losing its dominating position at the end of the 19th century, Sigmund Freud revived the debate with his assertion that every being has elements of both genders, male and female. Freud thereby returned to the old one sex theory with new scientific methods and conclusions. Today's modern medicine relies upon both concepts.

The penis may have something to do with reality, but its amazing growth refers to Klaus' evolution into a citizen participating in history. Klaus's endeavor to bring down the wall represents the historical fate of the GDR's entire population, not only its males. Yet the penis is the more appropriate symbol because of its visibility. A vagina would not have the same visual impact. Nonetheless, the penis stands as a symbol for both sexes, thus alluding to the one-sex theory. Klaus in his capacity as citizen who begins to see through the lies and deceptions of the GDR regime is not important because he is a male. The penis may get the attention, but it does not belong to a stereotypical manly hero.

Another remarkable facet in *Helden wie wir* that refers to the one-sex theory is the depiction of sperm. Sperm appears nearly everywhere in the novel. It drips from penises of adolescents, is squirted into socks and cloths, flows in front of the TV, is lost in Martina Pages vagina and besmirches East Berlin's staircases. It finally makes Klaus Uhltscht stumble and hurt himself. Through all these rough and obscene depictions the character of sperm is unequivocally clear: It is the bearer of new life. Its reproductive power guarantees the maintenance of the human race. However, the usual power of this wondrous substance goes even deeper. It not only creates new life, but also contains the seed of its source. Klaus' sperm is part of himself. His body produces it, thereby bestowing Klaus' traits and idiosyncrasies onto the spermatozoa. By masturbating, he is losing parts of his own body in a useless and unproductive way. Nothing follows from his activity as a sexual being giving off his secretion. As in the bloodletting episode in *Helden wie wir* a powerful liquid is just wasted without advantage for Klaus. Sperm, as Aristotle saw it, is a refined good, the essential of our body: "sperm, a foam much like the froth on the sea, was first refined out of the blood; it passed to the brain; from the brain it

made its way back through the spinal marrow, the kidneys, the testicles, and into the penis” (Laqueur 35). The notion that blood is the essential juice of life is still alive in today’s culture. The human sperm as the corporeal refinement of blood – according to the one sex theory – traverses all important station of the body, especially the spinal liquid and the brain where the seat of our identity is. Klaus is therefore giving away the most precious thing he possesses twice: his blood to Erich Honecker and his sperm to any place upon which he lavishes the product of his masturbation.

The one-sex theory maintains that also women produce sperm. As we know today, the fertile product of a woman is not her vaginal secretion but the ova produced in her ovaries. However, according to the one-sex theory when both sexes lose precious body liquid, they diminish their own power. Thus, the symbolism of Klaus’ losing his sperm is not exclusively male. For both genders it means a deprivation of personal energy: “both men and women are tired after ejaculation, not because the quantity of material emitted is so great but because of its quality: it is made from the purest part of the blood, from the essence of life” (Laqueur 38). Klaus wastes quantity and quality as well in his autoerotic activities. He loses political judgment in doing so, as we can see in the philosophers of the Greek antiquity, who recognized and prized the link between sexuality and politics: “The *kurios*, the strength of the sperma in generating new life, is the microcosmic corporeal aspect of the citizen’s deliberative strength, of his superior rational power, and of his right to govern. Sperma, in other words, is like the essence of citizen” (Laqueur 54, 55). The ancient descriptions of sexual behavior are always combined with the social role of the sexual beings in a functioning society. The sperm is a microcosm of the macrocosm, the outer, the real world.

Another combination of sexuality and politics is Klaus's obsession with being an agent whose secret task is to steal confidential information from the NATO headquarters in Brussels. The microfiches he hopes to find in the office of the secretary general doubtlessly have political value. Later, Klaus deforms the term "microfiche" into the malapropism micro fish and applies it while speaking about his semen. The "Mikrofische" become spermatozoa in his imagination. Klaus speaks of 50 million dead potential human beings whom he is wasting by ejaculating onto the floor (Brussig, *Helden* 193). The power of Klaus' sperm is associated with the potential lives dwelling in it: "... in einer Art fünfzigmillionenfachen Fischsterbens ... Könntest du in einer leergepumpten Karpfenzucht schlafen, inmitten von fünfzig Millionen zappelnden Karpfen, die vergeblich nach Luft schnappen?" (123).

The concept of the life-bearing sperm presented by Brussig is reminiscent of the theory of preformation popular in the 18th and 19th centuries: In the semen or in the female ovum the would-be human being was preformed in miniature. Every single part of the sperm is a tiny human being. Although the ovists²⁴ were the majority among preformationists, the so-called animalculists²⁵ were numerous as well. Preformationism is the first crowd theory, foreshadowing the crowd theories of the late 19th and 20th century.²⁶

Brussig does not directly allude to this cultural tradition but his depiction represents a metaphorical comparison between the single individual Klaus and the masses. Brussig

²⁴ The ovists maintained that the female ovum contains the completely preformed human being. The male semen was seen as the initial impulse to make it grow.

²⁵ The animalculists saw the preformed human beings swimming in the male sperm. The female ovum was regarded as a nutritious breeding ground for them.

²⁶ Important representatives: Gustave LeBon, Elias Canetti, José Ortega y Gasset. Also compare Laqueur 173.

links the individual and the crowds via Klaus's penis. The single virile member is capable of spouting masses of living creatures: The transition from the single hero to the people of the GDR that he represents is achieved through a sexual act.

Klaus himself bears traits of both genders. He is effeminate and weak in his inability to rebel against his mother²⁷. In the end he also shows great energy and the proficiency to act manly with his penis. Sometimes, Klaus' appears to be genderless. Then he is just the spineless guinea pig of a regime that performs experiments on him. This happens throughout his childhood, while he is with the Stasi, and especially during the bloodletting for Honecker. Sexuality and gender here lose their power, and the reader beholds a naked and defenseless creature flayed by its rulers. There are parallels with the classical picaresque novel. Here gender-bender actions often help the protagonist to overcome certain problems²⁸. Klaus' search for a definite sexual identity brings him into deep trouble. The crucial point is that the habit of assuming roles frequently occurs in picaresque novels. On their way in life protagonists in picaresque novels assume different roles.²⁹ Klaus happens to undergo the same changes. He is the helpless child, the insecure adolescent, the trainee in the army camp, the aspiring Nobel Prize candidate, the pervert, the socialist genius, the rapist, the Stasi spy, the broken-legged cripple, and finally the historical hero. Klaus' stages in life are not realistic but exemplary. They embody fates possible in the GDR. Brussig compresses these different stages, that are not likely to occur together with one single person, into his protagonist. This is precisely the ploy used

²⁷ Freud expects the revolution against the parents only from boys, not from girls. Therefore, Klaus's behavior would be – according to Freud – somehow feminine.

²⁸ In Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* the protagonist can avoid a fatal situation by hiding in women's clothing.

²⁹ *Simplicissimus'* career includes being a little child, a woman, a soldier, a looter, an actor and a singer, a beggar, and finally a hermit.

in the picaresque novel. However, the fast development of *Helden wie wir*'s storyline always brings Klaus back to the question of his sexual identity which he can finally solve by demonstrating manliness with his penis.

The historical outcome of the aforementioned two-sex theory has been the continuous development of a gender expectation. Sex and gender could be seen separately in the early modern times. In the 20th century they seem to have become conflated. Identifying as male or female leads to certain role expectations. How does Brussig use this to depict sexuality and especially the male penis in his novel? Typical gender roles are ascribed to certain representatives in *Helden wie wir*. We see the actions of the Stasi as male. Physical violence is reserved exclusively for male figures. Brussig depicts psychological violence and indoctrination as female. The maternal characters³⁰ stand as sentinels over the holy shrine "socialism". They influence the younger generation ideologically. They have the power of knowledge and to indoctrinate their children. That means, even without a penis characters can be very powerful. It may not be a directly measurable influence, but it influences the protagonist's ways of thinking. Brussig plays with these clichés of the active and sex-driven man and the passive woman controlled by her rationale. The penis represents only one kind of power. However, it does not embody the state power and its ideology. It is rather a symbol of spontaneous protest against the existing powers. A penis stiffens in an unpredictable way. When and how strong sexual feelings arouse it and make it strong cannot be foretold. This feature makes the penis apt to be used as the symbol of revolution against an organized system like the GDR. Klaus' grows slowly into a dissident in his own country. By passing from one catastrophe to the next he successively experiences the mendacious measures with

³⁰ Like Mutter Uhltscht, Jutta Müller, even Christa Wolf

which he is treated by his foes. Klaus' does not plan his historical feat. It happens – at least in Klaus' version – accidentally. However, Klaus' penis remains the instrument of the single and unorganized individual facing the oppressing state power. The protagonist's member is used metonymical for his right to lead an independent life: “Wann werden sie begreifen, ... daß es *mein* Schwanz ist und *meine* Angelegenheit, wo ich ihn reinstecke und was dranklebt, wenn ich ihn rausziehe” (Brussig, *Helden* 135). It also represents Klaus' growing responsibility for his own affairs. When Klaus has sex with Martina he contracts a venereal disease. Later, his sexual energy wanes when he is with Yvonne. His penis remains limp. Both cases reveal an incorrect use of the sexual organ. Neither with unprotected intercourse nor with impotency the Klaus can reach long-lasting satisfaction.

The penis also reveals the hidden, gloomy side of Klaus. His strong inner wishes and fantasy find their bleeding valve in his penis. While Klaus is primarily victim of a barbaric system, Brussig is keen on stressing that Klaus is a perpetrator as well: “aber ich erzähle in *Helden wie wir* ja nicht die Geschichte eines Opfers. Klaus Uhltscht ist eindeutig ein Täter. Naja, vielleicht könnte man auch sagen, er ist doch auch eine arme Sau. Aber für mich ist er in erster Linie ein Täter” (Walser 189).³¹ The penis thus represents Klaus' misled attempts to extricate himself from the shackles of his unfortunate life. Klaus wastes millions of ‘lives’ by masturbating onto the floor. Furthermore, the protagonist grows – due to his sexual drive and thereby his penis – into a sexual offender. Klaus is a criminal, a near-rapist, a child abductor. The connection of

³¹ In Brussig's play *Heimsuchung* the three East Germans Keks, Zillus, and Schulle become perpetrators out of desperation. Not linked to sexuality at all, the denouement of the play is gory. None of the three survives. Conspicuous for both works, *Heimsuchung* and *Helden wie wir*, is that Brussig does not depict his own fellow citizens as innocent victims.

crime and sex has its origin in the biblical story of Onan, the son of Judah. He is supposed to impregnate his brother's wife but does not do so because he ejaculates onto the soil: "And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled *it* on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also" (King James Study Bible, Gen. 38.9-10). This biblical story has parallels to the preformation theory and the "Mikrofische", it also makes not using one's virile member appropriately a crime. Onan is punished by god's will because he refuses to do the necessary thing. The sin of squandering one's semen is punished by death by the vengeful god of the Old Testament. Klaus is punished – this is an element of the novel's – by his own misdeeds. He does even not recoil from committing crimes.

The history of onanism is insightful. Especially in the 18th and 19th century onanism was regarded as pernicious, harmful to the "perpetrator" and destructive for the community in which he lived. The epidemic of masturbation in the late 18th and especially 19th century is triggered, among other things, by the flourishing sex literature (e.g. John Cleland: *Fanny Hill*, Walter: *My Secret Life*), a product of the new industrialized community in which all human inclinations and efforts are into the capitalistic system. The unproductive waste of semen by masturbation was therefore unacceptable in this system. On the other hand the strict separation of the two sexes created a chasm between males and females. Sexual drives were dammed up and could not be discharged easily because of the social distance between the sexes. The same applies to Klaus Uhltscht. He lives in a highly controlled and organized society that deprives the individual of personal freedom and attempts to monitor every action. The

consequences of early capitalism for the individual are thus comparable to those from communism: "... the perverted sexual body haunts society and reminds it of its fragility, as it had done in other ways for millennia" (Laqueur 233). In both systems limitation plays an important role, Klaus encounters people and authorities who withhold themselves from him, for example, the "Wurstfrau" or Martina who sees him only as a casual encounter. The fact that the "consumable" sex is not available to Klaus generates his sexual uprising - "sex at war" (Laqueur 233) - with its symbol, the penis, as warrior.

The penis is the executing organ of Klaus's perverted mind and also the physical indicator of his mental state. It "recounts" Klaus's life in short and represents important stages in his life. It is the needle on the big dial of life. One can do good things and bad things with the male member. The penis' power can serve criminal energy or beneficial welfare as we can see in the novel. It can draw its owner into sexual offenses or trigger the opening of the Berlin wall. Of course, this polarity chosen by Brussig is highly ironical and divorced from reality.

Brussig depicts Klaus' catharsis in the development of his penis. It is for sure that the protagonist, blindfolded by his own perversions and blurred imaginations of the socialistic regime, will awake painfully one day and then recognize his wrongdoings. Brussig uses all his narrative power to make the story cruder and cruder. Setting out from harmless masturbation fantasies at home, Klaus meets rough camp colleagues with whom he jerks off. Later, he has sex with Martina Page and then tries to rape an older woman. The great masturbation scene in the staircase (Brussig, *Helden* 196-198) denotes a culmination of sexuality in the double sense of the word. Finally Klaus' accident on the Alexanderplatz stairs brings about the change. The big "Eiersalat" (Brussig, *Helden* 290)

and the injured penis caused by Klaus's falling down the stairs open his mind for the stark reality.³² "Es tat so verdammt weh, aber es war auch so verdammt ehrlich. Was glauben Sie, warum ich heute so verzweifelt radikal in Ihr Diktiergerät sprechen kann?" (293).

Klaus' gigantic penis helps him in the end to prevail over his mother who can no longer ignore her son's sexuality. Faced with a super-sized genital, she capitulates and runs in a panic from the hospital room harum-scarum. Frank Thomas Grub maintains that Klaus thus commits matricide. It is true in so far that the mother is banned from Klaus by then.³³ The size of the penis reflects its power. This picture is first introduced in the masturbation competition between Klaus and his tent camp acquaintances. The size of the penis becomes more and more important for Klaus, who has suffered from a minute sexual organ throughout his life. Suddenly he feels empowered by the beast between his legs. The fact that the penis has changed its size embodies Klaus' inner growth. He awakes from the delusions he had wallowed in. The depiction of Klaus' penis is a visual mainstay and satirical indicator of the protagonist's personal constitution.

Yet, what is the penile perspective? Does Klaus eventually consummate the matrimony between East and West Germany? Klaus' behavior encourages the reader to

³² Klaus is physically marred by his fall down the stairs. He is a cripple whose inner perversions are mirrored in the state of his body. His ugliness reminds one of the exhibits in curiosity collections. See Gerstenberger, "Only the Wall". Gerstenberger describes different panoptiums, e.g. the "Gurltsche Mißbildungssammlung and the collection by Rudolf Virchow. Here the preparations of deformed human beings are the creatures of ugliness that haunt their beholders. The contorted creature transgresses society's laws of decency and harmony. They disturb and arouse new pictures in the minds of their viewers. Klaus is – so to speak – a living preparation. His ugliness and bodily and mental contortion do not only disturb himself and other people but also change history. The power of the ugly brings about knowledge and change.

³³ "Brussig ist mit seiner Haltung damit zwar nicht zum Vaternörder geworden – wie Monika Maron in *Stille Zeile sechs* –, wohl aber zum Muttermörder" (Grub 1: 668). Maron's protagonist Rosalind frees herself by aggravating Beerenbaum, a former Stasi collaborator, so that he dies of a heart attack in the end. The comparison between Klaus and Rosalind makes sense. Both shake off the fetters of the older generation. However, Maron's novel ends pessimistic. She does not seek a relaxed humor like in *Helden wie wir*.

see East Germany as the penetrating party. It is not likely that Brussig wants to demonstrate East Germany's rebellion against the corrupt regime as a form of penetrating and conquering West Germany. The penis image is the satirical embodiment of the inert civilian revolution which led to the fall of the wall. Yet the salient political decisions in the legal unification process were made by West Germany's politicians.³⁴ The penis metaphor should not be regarded as the victory of East Germany in the reunification. This would be an overdrawn interpretation. However, the growing penis is a strong symbol for the individual's protest against a perverted environment and at the same time a means of liberation.

I.6. The Language of Sexuality

Before identifying the characteristic vocabulary of the language of sex in *Helden wie wir*, we should briefly reflect the topos "language" in general. First, a language is an oral-aural means for the exchange of messages. Certainly, the conveyance of messages is the main function and enables cultural exchange between people – written or spoken. However, before this can happen, the language as such must exist and be able to assume its function. The coinage of expressions which are commonly understood precedes the actual use of concepts or words. Coining expressions denotes, however, the transition from mental pictures, from ideas about the world into a discrete word. That means a language is always a model of explaining the world. How do certain people envision their world? How do they explain the conditions and unformulated rules, which are applied in their social or natural environs? It happens by building another world, a world of words,

³⁴ More about this complex in chapter II about America.

formed through the development of a language. The power of language is often greater than the power of reality because its virtual force has replaced physical force³⁵. Language can thereby be a substitute for reality.

A scrutiny of the words used in language can disclose hidden and tacit mechanisms about which the user of a language normally does not think while speaking. The difference between spoken language and literature is, of course, that the former is often a product of spontaneous reaction whereas the latter is a composition of deliberately chosen words.

Brussig's novel is situated exactly between spoken and written language. It keeps its liveliness by transferring major oral elements into the language of literature. *Helden wie wir* is a hermaphrodite of oral recount carved into the rigid stone of written manifestation. It does not an accident that Klaus Uhltscht "talks" the whole text into a journalist's microphone. This enables Brussig to use, among other elements of language, the patterns of sexual vernacular instead of a polished literary language. The narrative situation vindicates the use of "Umgangssprache" which dominates the novel. It is by no means because Brussig was incapable of writing in a classical style. It is Brussig's wish to create a living language explicitly set against the rigidity of literary works. The topic of the novel is the reunification of Germany clad into the language of sexuality. Behind the scenes, it is the story of how a static historical situation could be set into motion again. Motion against coagulation – spoken words against written words. Brussig shows how movement came into the unification process by replacing historical events with the sexual

³⁵ One example might be: The modern citizen of democratic countries cannot obtain justice anymore by using his individual force. He has to delegate a contentious matter to a court. A possible contention with a neighbor about the borderline between their premises cannot be legally solved in a fist fight. It has to be fought with words in front of a court. Here we see how the power of language increases in modern society. Language is able to assume formerly physical functions which are now virtually executed – that is in effigy.

life of his protagonist. This means, according to Brussig's concept, that the movement has to be mirrored in the language that does not necessarily strive for exclusiveness and novelties, yet violates the principles of dignified and traditional prose.

Looking at the history of erotic or sexual literature we find two different types of sexual language: the language of poetic refinement and the language of blatant directness. The former creates an independent register of ciphers and metonyms with which it replaces the expressions used in daily life. The pictorial language is poetic and tries to soften harsh sexual incidents by harmonizing them. Authors like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe or Theodor Fontane cloaked their texts into piquant equivocation³⁶. Sexual paraphrases can be read on two levels – the literal and the metaphorical. One reason for doing so is to avoid upsetting the reader, another reason is the author's stylistic intention. On the other hand, there is the literature of crude transgression against the civil morality. Authors like Marquis de Sade or Henry Miller were famous for arousing public ire, breaching the traditions of decency, they used unvarnished sexual language and explicit details.³⁷

Brussig's language is definitely not the language of refinement and poetic make-up. Unashamed and bold, he describes unvarnished sexual actions and fantasies but not only for the sake of arousing protest. At the appearance of *Helden wie wir*, Brussig himself was not sure about the effect the novel's crass language could have on readers.

³⁶ Goethe: Compare the delicate handling of Faust's making love to Gretchen or Wilhelm Meister's intercourse with Mignon. Fontane: See the secretive hints pointing toward the love affair of Effi Briest and Major Crampas.

³⁷ Compare the crude sexual pictures in Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Here sexuality in its clearest form is part of the bohemian lifestyle. Sex takes place often between venereally diseased artists and abject whores. Brutality and emotional numbness play a major role.

But he himself was rather astonished by the complaisant acceptance with which his readers received the book equally in East and West Germany:

Ich habe nicht an die Erfolgszahlen gedacht beim Schreiben. Ehrlich gesagt war ich über den Erfolg des Romans sehr überrascht. Ich habe gedacht, ich sei jetzt so eine Art Nestbeschmutzer. ... Die Verkaufszahlen liegen so bei fifty-fifty im Osten und Westen, wobei ja der Osten weniger Menschen hat. (Walser 188)

Sexual descriptions in *Helden wie wir* profit from colloquialisms of all types. In the satire a new light is shed on these words. In the past Brussig had repeatedly stated that he wanted to make people think about their own history with his books. He did not intend to present the longed-for “Wenderoman”³⁸ that explains the reunification history in a final and exemplary way. Brussig rather regards *Helden wie wir* as a means to lower the threshold of inhibition in talking about the past.

Doch mein Held spricht nicht nur mit ungehörter Offenheit über sein Versagen – nein, sein Versagen ... übersteigt auch alles, was es in der DDR an Versagen gegeben hat. Ich hatte die Hoffnung, daß ein solches Buch dem begeisterten Leser ... zeigt, daß eine ehrliche Konfrontation mit dem eigenen Versagen ‚reinigt‘. ... Und ich dachte: Wenn der Leser spürt, daß selbst dieser Held, der eine ... sehr lächerliche Figur ist, wenn der also über sein Versagen reden kann ... warum soll sich dann auch nicht der Leser ermuntert fühlen, sich endlich auch mit seinem Versagen zu konfrontieren?“ (Brussig, “Wir sind nostalgisch”)

Sexual words attempt to break taboos and enable the reader to think in a freer way. Yet there are far more subtle ideas hidden in the text. As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, language enables us to build our own world in which we are able to express

³⁸ For a recent assessment of the term “Wenderoman” and the expectations it caused compare Grub 1: 84-95 and Gabler 70-91.

things because we have words, the oral substitutes for concepts. What we deem to be reality is mainly a product of our language. Two layers of reality exist in Klaus Uhltscht's world; the hypocritical world view of the old state in its final throes – represented by characters like Klaus' parents or his colleagues at the Stasi and the raw and painful exclamation of truth clad in a vocabulary of boldness – represented mainly by Klaus himself.

The Stasi's methods of communicating show best how an ideological meta-language works. Words do not denote reality but are embellishing ciphers for taboos, for things about which one should not talk openly. Highly visible is the inclination of this code language towards euphemistic disguise. Identification codes like "Kochlöffel" or "Hölderlin" (both Brussig, *Helden* 163) encapsulate entire personal fates in one single word and make one forget the vicious surveillance and archival storage of the Stasi. These euphemisms build an atmosphere of lies. This enciphering process is only surpassed by the way in which people talk about the Stasi. The name of the institution remains an absolute taboo: "Von Stasi war nie die Rede! Herr Schnürsenkel redete immer von uns ..." (Brussig, *Helden* 112). Klaus plays this game of verbal disguise. His job at the Stasi requires that he do so, and he had developed these skills during his adolescence. He masks a rag in which he clandestinely catches his ejaculate as rag used for repairing his bicycle. His mother sees through this camouflage and knows about his furtive masturbation. They have a conversation about the usefulness and danger of riding a bicycle (compare 86, 87). Klaus and his mother are conscious that the main reason for their talk is Klaus' sexual activities but they wage their fight behind a fake conversation that avoids mentioning sexuality.

Brussig makes the philosophizing Oberleutnant Eulert, one of the main representatives of this fake language, tell the truth about contorting and feigning one's words: "Das ist die Negation der Negation" (153). The truth is broken in the ciphers and codes used by the state organs that encroaches upon the private communication in families like Klaus's. The indoctrination is implemented on the level of words and thereby deprives the educated individual of the possibility of protesting against his environment. The language of sexuality in *Helden wie wir* is always connected to the political-ideological level. Klaus is not initially a critic of the regime. His attempts to become independent happen via sexuality. Political criticism may originate in a natural feeling,³⁹ too, but is not the momentum which thrusts Klaus forward. The protagonist is "einer von ihnen" (315), not a dissenter but a seduced and weak character who becomes entangled in the perversions of the state, becoming perverted himself. It would not be plausible to turn such a character into a paragon of political resistance. Klaus finds his way out with sexuality. Therefore, the language of sexuality he develops and sets against the fake language of the ruling ideology mirrors his liberation. Brussig consciously juxtaposes both languages to the effect that the reader cannot differentiate between politics and sexuality anymore. These areas conflate in the novel's diction.

Like a cheeky child using foul words, Klaus frees himself by articulating what he could not say for such a long time of oppression. His parents – here they stand metonymical for the whole state – did not provide him with the necessary words for dealing with his hidden sides. There is only the controlled hygienic area which premeditatedly fades out sexuality, highly regarded as dirty. The words which name sexual obscenity grant Klaus access to his unfulfilled wishes. Klaus often uses the

³⁹ E.g. a natural feeling against injustice

language of adolescence showing the sexual struggle in which pubescent children are trapped: “Vater-Pisser-reinstecken-Muschi-Mutter? Unmöglich!” (63). Young Klaus cannot believe that he exists because his father inserted his penis into his wife’s vagina and ejaculated. The untold story of Klaus’ procreation has to be found in words. Klaus has to invent words in order to make it conceivable and presentable to Mr. Kitzelstein – and thereby to the reader.

The sexual words Brussig uses are short and concise. The variety of names Klaus applies for male and female sexual organs is inexhaustible: Puller, Pisser, Schwanz, Pimmel, Speer, Trompete, Klöten, Muschi, Vulva, Katze, Möse, Fotze, Pflaume, Titten

Brussig incorporates the sound of sexuality in his text: “Floggfloggflogg” is the onomatopoeic translation of Klaus’s masturbation noise. Word plays like “6film”, “6idol”, or “6y” reveal the prudishness of Klaus’ mother and make her East German dialect audible in the reader’s imagination. It is a sexual micro-language in which Klaus recounts his life, combining sexual revolt with humorous lewdness. Sexuality can be jesting and pictorial: “In diesem Bett wird ein 90-Kilo-Penis liegen” (303). The beast-like penis is the epitome of Klaus’ manliness.

The language of sexuality is not only a means of liberation but also the projection screen for hidden aggressiveness. Raymund coaxes his colleague René into telling him how he makes love to his wife. Raymund’s commands are aggressive. They stimulate his fantasy that projects its own pictures of sexual engagement: “mal so richtig über ihre Brüste bürsten ... in ihrer Fotze kramen ... bei ihr einbrummen ... Du würdest die Alte vor dir aufbocken und sie von hinten nehmen, ja? ... Damit du ihr zartrosa Mösenfleisch siehst ...” (Brussig, *Helden* 120-121). In all these formulations violence suggests the

enormous power behind the sexual drive. The “Totensonntagfick,” again, brings together sexuality and society. This word not only accounts for the very procreation of Klaus, it also solidifies his fate as a socially underprivileged person. The swear word stigmatizes Klaus and defines his position as an outsider among his fellow pupils.

There are, however, no symbolic riddles in the words Brussig uses to denote sexual organs or activities. Brussig’s vocabulary of sexuality embodies political and social developments, but it is always straightforward and direct. The language of Klaus’ sexuality appears extremely powerful when Brussig contrasts it with the language of other authorities. The way how he juxtaposes Christa Wolf’s speech⁴⁰ with Klaus’ lewd and pugnacious railing is a vehicle for criticizing Wolf. Klaus’s rude sex slang does not mingle with Wolf’s carefully formulated speech. This makes the reader aware of Wolf’s speech.⁴¹

Other authorities quoted in *Helden wie wir* are Siegfried Schnabel and Sigmund Freud. Brussig loves to contrast the formal terms of the two theoreticians with rude colloquialisms. “Deviationen”, “Zoophilie”, and “Deformationsfetischist” are contrasted with “Schwanz”, “Möse” or “Klößen”. Klaus never gives us explicit depictions of sexuality. An erotic novel would attempt to go into detail and adorn and paint sexuality more exactly. The rough colloquialisms do not find a visual counterpart in *Helden wie wir*. Brussig did not intend to write a pornographic novel. He uses the erotic colloquialisms to startle his readership.⁴² In fact, Brussig’s novel is not at all erotic. The

⁴⁰ Held at November 4th 1989 at the Alexanderplatz in Berlin, five days before the actual fall of the wall.

⁴¹ Brussig accuses Wolf to of subservience to the regime of the GDR. He uses the Klaus’ sexual language to emphasize his criticism. He repeats Wolf verbatim. Needing a contrasting to explain the issue, he employs sexuality.

⁴² Compare Gabler 76. He calls *Helden wie wir* a pornographic, picaresque novel. Pornographic literature tries to arouse lust in the reader. This is not Brussig’s intention.

sensuous, lustful part is missing. Every erotic suggestion becomes literally emasculated by the satirical overtone which suffuses the whole novel. The first important event in Klaus' sexual life is the one-night stand with Martina Page. Brussig's depiction of sexual intercourse is sarcastic rather than erotic: "Synchron dazu fädelte sie sich meinen Schwanz ein. ... Und tatsächlich: nach einer Weile kam vorne auch was heraus!" (128-129).

Sexuality is too often related to pain and perversion in *Helden wie wir*. Therefore, it is neither the playfulness of erotic nor the lust-laden lasciviousness of pornography. Brussig does not provide the graphic description of actual intercourse as we could expect in an erotic or pornographic novel. The language is completely devoid of arousing depictions of sex. Sexuality in this novel inspires disgust and repulsion: Sperm in rags, an infected urethra, and a disfigured crotch show the unappealing side of sexuality. The satirical tone softens the abomination and brutality, but they are still intrusively present. Klaus undergoes torture-like experiences. He slides down a staircase, contracts a venereal disease, severely injures his penis, and loses his blood. He is an oppressed and flayed character relentlessly clad in the language of sexuality. Yet, the reader can laugh at Klaus because Brussig's language of sexuality is a linguistic experiment between sex and satire, between humor and absurdity. The experiment works out.

II. Fathers of Freedom and Their Followers? - The Depiction of the United States

Although *Helden wie wir* deals mainly with the German history of 1989, it copiously alludes to the United States of America. There is Klaus Uhltscht's interviewer, an American journalist from the *New York Times*. There are the many allusions to Ronald Reagan, to American pop culture, and – of course - the famous American ideal of freedom. Brussig does not depict the United States directly in his novel, but he lets it continuously shine through in the whole text. It seems as if America is indispensable not only to world politics but also to recent German literature. This raises several questions: is America still seen as a moral instance in world history? Are the Americans and their way of life still a longed-for ideal for the Germans? Is the land of the 'unlimited freedom' still a sanctuary and source of democratic inspiration for people from all over the world? How does its politics impinge on countries like Germany even 50 years after the end of the Second World War? Is Klaus Uhltscht, the contorted son of socialism, now the emissary of the American way of life, heralding the concept of freedom and democracy to his fellow citizens in East Germany? *Helden wie wir* gives literary answers to these questions.

It will turn out that the theme 'America' is thoroughly embedded in the novel and intertwined with the fate of Germany. The appearance of America is not only embroidery but the gigantic backdrop of the theater of Germany's reunification spectacle.

II.1. Talking big or Talking true? – Klaus Uhltscht and Oscar Kitzelstein

The journalist Oscar Kitzelstein is one of the most mysterious characters in *Helden wie wir*. He is the only person who does not say one single word but squeezes a 320 page story out of his interviewee, the protagonist Klaus Uhltscht. Kitzelstein's weight is already underscored by the title of the first chapter, "Kitzelstein". This keeps the reader aware that the invisible journalist is not just a fringe character but a mighty power behind the throne. The reader seems to know everything about Klaus Uhltscht at the end of the novel but gets barely anything about Oscar Kitzelstein. The journalist remains a phantom. One reason may be that he is not in the need of accounting for his origin. Kitzelstein is part of an all-mighty press institution, the New York Times, which stands unaccounted for itself. By leaving the character Oscar Kitzelstein largely blank, Brussig enables the reader to slip into his role. The reader is actually "listening" to Klaus' microphone monologues and is supposed to judge or at least to critically assess the protagonist's statements. Kitzelstein, the flawless investigator, is thus also the reader's identification figure.

Klaus frequently addresses Mr. Kitzelstein in the course of his account. So the reader remains aware of his presence. Klaus's monologue is not solely a dramatic soliloquy but a story recorded under the "surveillance" of an audience. Kitzelstein metonymically represents the audience of the *New York Times* to whom he is supposed to convey Klaus's message later. However, Klaus and Kitzelstein are not equals. Klaus is the supplicant looking for publicity. He needs the power of the institution Kitzelstein represents. The *New York Times* commented on its on role in a book review of *Helden*

wie wir: “Klaus has plenty to confess, and in a *New York Times* correspondent named Oscar Kitzelstein, he thinks he has found the perfect confessor. Kitzelstein - or, rather, his tape recorder - will get Klaus's story right, in contrast to the West German tabloids, which might stoop to sensation” (Upchurch 11). Picking up on what Klaus calls the “Sprachrohr des liberalen Weltgewissens” (Brussig, *Helden* 8), the *New York Times* sees itself as a confessor. Without abasing itself by publishing racy and contorted stories, the newspaper remains true to its role as sober seeker of verity.

By choosing the *New York Times* as Klaus’ sanctuary and juxtaposing it with the German newspaper BILD Brussig suggests that there are huge differences among the Western media. Klaus is looking for a way to spread his message without distorting it. He fears the bold and lurid headlines of the West German tabloids – especially BILD, not necessarily a reliable and truth-seeking medium which he could entrust with his story. He does not find it in a German newspaper but in the *New York Times*. Journalistic research methods of the media in English-speaking countries differ from the German media. The former prefer strongly investigative methods and often focus on the disclosure of secrets⁴³. Sometimes condemned as gutter or yellow press, this sort of journalism is praised in *Helden wie wir*: “Ich habe gehofft, mein Anteil an den Geschehnissen jener Nacht bliebe noch eine Weile unerkannt – aber da habe ich die Beharrlichkeit des amerikanischen investigativen Journalismus einfach unterschätzt” (6). Klaus maintains that while the Germans are still bewildered by the sight of the fallen wall, American newspapers, quick on the draw, reconnoiter the historical situation and report on it. Here

⁴³ Cf. Esser who analyzes the differences between English and German journalism. The book mainly refers to Great Britain, but journalism in America and the United Kingdom are similar. Generally, Esser sees the German newspapers as more reflective and commenting a status quo whereas the English newspapers rather strive to drag secret stories into public and create scandals. In a nutshell, defensive German media versus offensive English media.

one of Brussig's substantial political critiques shines through: the lackadaisical East Germans whom Klaus has to admonish at the wall with "loslaufen müßt ihr selber!" seem unable to hold their own history in their hands. The people have the power, but do not know how to effectively apply it. Klaus observes flocks of dull citizens at the wall, ridiculing them because he cannot understand why they are so passive. In the political system behind his interviewer Kitzelstein the protagonist sees a much more powerful and active nation that can react and seize its opportunities.⁴⁴ The world power of the United States serves as symbol to expose the Germans' cowardly handling of their own history. Opportunities for positive behavior are frittered away by torpidly loitering around at the Berlin wall. However, the decidedly 'investigative' Kitzelstein does not act like a typically insistent curious American as he listens to Klaus's outpouring. Will he do this later or is he not as good an investigator Klaus praises him to be? Or, another possibility, has he already loosened Klaus' tongue and is now bathing in Klaus's word cascades? The name Kitzelstein itself alludes to the German verb "herauskitzeln" which literally means "to tickle something out of somebody". The journalist does not press his interviewee. He gently and aimiably lures the story out of Klaus. Klaus, however, is an easy case. In his megalomaniac moods he loquaciously speaws out the story of his fate. The journalist is only the trigger for a person so badly in the need of unburdening his soul. Kitzelstein's guest will tell him everything. We do know, though, that Kitzelstein must have been somehow active at the beginning of their meeting. That is because Klaus addresses his counterpart's journalistic needs at the very end of the novel: "Denn ich bin das *Missing link* der jüngsten deutschen Geschichte! War es das, was Sie wissen wollten?" (323).

⁴⁴ When Klaus becomes active by opening the wall, he begins to free himself and think independently. He seizes his chances and therefore gains power and knowledge. Compare hereunto Symmank 188.

Klaus refers to an English phrase and finally asks Kitzelstein if he is content with his account. This reflects the existence of certain expectations on the part of American journalists and the American audience. Klaus superficially attempts to satisfy his audience's wishes. While he flatters Kitzelstein with charming comments, he is quite bold at times: "Um mich bei Ihren amerikanischen Lesern verständlich zu machen: Dagmar Frederic ist eine Fernsehshow-Moderatorin, ungefähr so apart wie Nancy Reagan" (67). The reader knows that Dagmar Frederic is a frumpy surrogate for more attractive females. Nancy Reagan is on a par with an old-fashioned GDR TV star. Klaus is the victim of a system that left him psychically marred. However, he is also a prudently calculating go-getter who knows where to get what he desires: "Daß ich ausgerechnet Ihnen die Geschichte meines Schwanzes erzähle, hat nicht nur mit Ihrer Spürnase zu tun, sondern vor allem mit Ihrer Visitenkarte. Wann bekommt man schon die Chance, sich einem Korrespondenten der *New York Times* anzuvertrauen!" (8).

It is not only the noble ideal of American liberty that informs Klaus' choice of the *New York Times* as his partner. It is also the power and reputation behind that name. Klaus opts for a newspaper whose business cards open doors all over the world. Inclined to megalomania, Klaus not only compares himself to geniuses like Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud, says to Kitzelstein: "Aber Klaus... Sie heißen Oscar – wollen wir tauschen?" (43). Klaus's generous offer to swap names shows him equal to his interlocutor. Klaus, the formerly abject pervert and wretched Stasi spy, now unashamedly consorts with the world power USA. His leap is quite amazing, from the abysmal depths of social inferiority to the heights of an interview partner of the *New York Times*.

However, even if one considers Klaus to be a big-mouthed boaster, the oppressed GDR citizen, enters the Western world. The 40 year separation of Germany into two states is over, and so is the 28 year period of confinement behind concrete and a barbed wire fence. The winner in the competition for hegemony is the capitalistic world. Klaus Uhltscht – the satirical wall hero – has brought his people back where they belong. The historical need for the reunification has been realized. Now we see a new alliance between Klaus Uhltscht and Oscar Kitzelstein. Klaus can unleash his craving for recognition and also unburden his heart. With Kitzelstein he does not only talk big but also true.

The location of Klaus's meeting with Kitzelstein is not mentioned explicitly. We may assume that it is New York City, the domicile of the *New York Times* headquarters. New York is the most international place in the entire United States, brimming with people from all over the world. Ellis Island once welcomed myriads of immigrants, many of them from Germany. The mixture of cultures, races, and religions existing in New York demonstrates the city's tolerance and openness for refugees and immigrants seeking new lives. Here a typical description of the city's aura: "In New York fragt niemand nach Allgemeinbildung und Abitur. Das Individuum hat keine *Vergangenheit* und deshalb nur eine Zukunft. Hier gibt es nur Fremde und deshalb gar keine" (Häusermann/Siebel qtd. in Hamann 11). Klaus, however, has a past. He is working up his personal history and thereby setting out into the future. America and in particular New York become the embodiment of hope for the Germans. Klaus has arrived at the destination of his historical mission.

II.2. Born to Be Free - America as a Symbol for Freedom and Peace

The United States has been a major advocate of Germany's reunification. Not only did President George H. Bush grant his approbation to a legal reunification of the two German states under the aegis of West Germany to Chancellor Helmut Kohl during the reunification negotiations 1989/90, but America has long advocated dismantlement of the wall.

In his 1963 visit to West Berlin John F. Kennedy's was clearly aware of the perversion of the artificially erected wall that divided one people into two states: "Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect, but we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in to prevent them from leaving us" (Kennedy). This statement tallies with Brussig's own feelings. For him, the forced separation by a concrete wall was just not comprehensive. In interviews Brussig often said that the wall disgusted him. He was even harsher about the complicity of both East and West Germans in accepting this construct of political blindness and arbitrariness. When Kennedy gave his speech, Brussig and his generation were not yet born. However, the author, born in 1965, shares the American president's view, separated by three decades. One should, of course, keep in mind that Kennedy's objective was not so much the welfare of the German nation itself but America's strength in the Cold War. He knew that a divided Germany would foment strife between the political blocs and make it difficult to maintain peace in the world. In 1963 he said about the city of West Berlin: "It is as secure in that sense as the rest of us for we cannot separate its safety from our own" (Kennedy). The worldwide implications of Germany's history and its impingement onto the political

tribune were obvious. The Berlin wall became the centerpiece of world politics. Here the world would see where the struggle between America and the Soviet Union could end. Kennedy's blunt advocacy for a united Germany anticipated the historical reality by 36 years. Brussig does not explicitly mention Kennedy in his novel. However, the 35th president of the United States drew the parallels between the fate of his country and the Germans.

Ronald Reagan, continuously cited in *Helden wie wir* as the "Sprechprobenpräsident" carried forward the American position on Germany during a phase of gradual decline of the Soviet world power in the 80s. He delivered a speech in 1987 at the Berlin wall that conveys his political conviction:

No American who sees first hand the concrete and mortar, the guard posts and machinegun towers, the dog runs and the barbed wire, can ever again take for granted his or her freedom or the precious gift that is America. That gift of freedom is actually the birthright of all humanity. And that's why as I stood there I urged the Soviet leader Mr. Gorbachev to send a new signal of openness to the world by tearing down that wall. (Reagan)

Reagan brings together Germany and America closer in his speech.⁴⁵ The freedom of all Americans from state violence is directly connected to the fate of the Germans who have to live with guns and fences every day. For Brussig, Reagan's blunt statement hits the nail right on the head. What millions of East Germans⁴⁶ cannot manage to express Ronald

⁴⁵ In opposition to Brussig's extremely positive view of Reagan, Rolf Hochhuth compares the US president to a vicegerent of Hitler in his play *Judith*. Here we have the perspectives of two German authors who are diametrical to each other. Compare Wettberg, pages 168-206 and 209-210.

⁴⁶ Brussig criticizes his fellow citizens. He does not focus on the West Germans. The Federal Republic of Germany inscribed the reunification in its constitution, the Basic Law. This paragraph, deleted after the actual reunification in 1990, showed over decades West Germany's conviction that a divided Germany is only a temporary solution. However, hope for unification shrank more and more over the decades. It also lost its dominant position on the political agenda of Bonn.

Reagan says openly, as *Helden wie wir* acknowledges: “Mit dem Ausruf ‘Die Mauer muß weg!’ wäre alles gesagt, aber der kam eben nicht von Christa Wolf, sondern von Ronald Reagan, dem Sprechproben-Präsidenten” (307-308). Christa Wolf, pars pro toto for the whole phalanx of GDR intellectuals who did not dare to express what was in the hearts of so many citizens,⁴⁷ is contrasted with the American president. In excoriating Wolf, Brussig resembles many West Germans who criticized East German intellectuals. Critics like Ulrich Greiner, Frank Schirrmacher, and Marcel Reich-Ranicki never tired of criticizing Christa Wolf. They pointed out “Christa Wolf sei eine ‘Staatsdichterin’ gewesen und habe direkt zum Fortbestand der DDR beigetragen ...” (Garbe 23).⁴⁸ Although the contrast to America is not evident here, Brussig takes sides with the Western critics.

Brussig broadens the whole debate by including the opposite image of America. In *Helden wie wir* the United States appears more clear-sighted than the East Germans. The official position of the American government has always been that the wall had to fall in order to establish peace and freedom. Brussig’s indictment is that East German intellectuals who had the actual power to set the ball rolling did nothing but prevaricate and try to sooth the masses with soft talk. The courageous and daring political actor in *Helden wie wir* is, besides Klaus, the United States.

The way Klaus records his message demonstrates how important Brussig considers the American influence onto Germany’s history. Directly alluding to the public mannerisms

⁴⁷ This is, of course, Brussig’s personal view. Christa Wolf plays the role of East Germany’s scapegoat in *Helden wie wir*.

⁴⁸ Martin Greiner, the chief feuilletonist of the *Zeit*, the omnipresent critic Reich-Ranicki, and the rather conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* editor Schirrmacher represent the upper crust of Germany’s literary scene. Their voices are mightier than Brussig’s. For the whole debate compare the chapter “Intellektuellenschelte” in Garbe 23-29. Also compare the chapter “Kampf gegen eine Kaste – Die Intellektuellen und die deutsche Einheit” in Anz 161-166.

of the “Sprechprobenpräsident” Ronald Reagan, Klaus himself tests a microphone before recording his story. The narrative situation reminds the reader of the way the American president addressed the masses. Reagan had a talent for making speeches that were spontaneous, relaxed, informal and yet persuasive.⁴⁹ Brussig bestows the same qualities upon his protagonist. Klaus is – so to speak – the East German embodiment of an American president. He emulates the American tradition of discussing by drawing parallels between his and Reagan’s position in front of the microphone.

Yet, what was the actual role of the United States between 1989 and 1990? Was America as important as *Helden wie wir* suggests? Or were the Russians and Gorbachev’s approbation of the reunification the decisive factor? Brussig’s allegations tallies with the most recent historiography. The German historian Manfred Görtemaker considers the role of the United States in the unification process as crucial.⁵⁰ George H. Bush’s massive backing of Helmut Kohl’s policies and tactics put pressure on the Soviet Union. Gorbachev had to be brought to a state of acquiescence, accepting the unification even if there was a great opposition in the USSR itself. In the beginning the Russians did not support the unification. It took lots of Western persuasiveness and loans to persuade the USSR. The unification was finally made possible because of the dismemberment of the Warsaw pact states. Thus the USSR was powerless and could not prevent the process. However, there was a moment when the Russian opponents of reunification called for a war. The unequivocal support West Germany received from the United States is one main

⁴⁹ Ronald Reagan was famous for his spontaneity with journalists. His ability to be quick at repartee while facing unexpected questions is legendary. Brussig throws a humorous glance at Reagan’s mannerisms by citing one of his catchphrases: “Ich freue mich, Ihnen mitteilen zu dürfen, daß ich soeben ein Gesetz zur Bombardierung Russlands unterzeichnet zu haben” (18)

⁵⁰ Even if this time is not covered by *Helden wie wir* anymore it still shows the continuing influence of the US in the period until the “real” unification on October 3rd 1990.

reason why its position in the negotiations with Russia remained strong and a looming war was, luckily, averted⁵¹. *Helden wie wir* acknowledges the role of the United States. However, the novel does not deal directly with America and its culture. The catchphrases and keywords referring to America are scattered generously in the text. Whenever Klaus Uhltzsch refers to blue jeans, Elvis Presley, James Dean or American pop songs he is imagining his own freedom. The cultural allusions to American mantras, movie stars, or just well-known commodities set the protagonist apart from the GDR's ideology. He gains mental flexibility and distance from oppression. American items also become the matter of contention between followers and adversaries of the GDR regime. Klaus's mother's hatred is manifested in her derisive mocking at America: "Wissen Sie, warum die USA den Vietnamkrieg verloren haben? Weil mit Jeanskrüppeln kein Krieg zu gewinnen ist" (30). She is blindly prejudiced against the Western world without actually knowing it. The jeans become a symbol of political insufficiency. Klaus's colleague at the Stasi, Eule, objects to American images as well: "Es heißt nicht Pluhchiens, wir sind hier nicht in Amerika. Es heißt: blaue Drillichhosen" (182). However, American images are symbols of hope and redemption for the younger generation of GDR citizens, icons of freedom. Brussig connects these icons with political dissension: "Flanell reimt sich auf Rebell! Und *Jeans* ist ein Konzentrat aus *James* und *Dean*" (Brussig, *Helden* 131).

Later, Klaus and his Stasi colleagues observe a person with the alias "Individualist" clandestinely playing the board game "Monopoly", the epitome of capitalism (see Brussig, *Helden* 227). Besides being a humorous allusion, "Monopoly",

⁵¹ Compare: "The fact that the Soviet Union had changed its attitude so drastically was to a large extent due to the unwavering US backing of the West German position. ... Kohl therefore expressed thanks to the US administration for its 'magnificent support from the outset' on Germany's path toward unity" (Görtemaker 182).

invented in the United States, the game has another meaning. It is the ideological monopoly that the East German government maintains over its citizens by means of Stasi observation and brainwashing. Originally capitalistic, “Monopoly” becomes a symbol of criticism of communism. Klaus’s world may be sexual and perverted, but it is also political: “und die Welt, auf die ich kam, war eine politische Welt” (Brussig, *Helden* 5). *Helden wie wir* is not an exclusively political novel but the political undertone is undeniable and breaks through almost any passage. Klaus begins to align his own perverted plans with the tactics of American election campaigns:

George Bush zum Beispiel, der Nachfolger des Sprechproben-Präsidenten, wurde für seinen Ausspruch Read my lips: No new taxes! gewählt. Mit Read my lips wird man Nummer Eins der blauen Welt? Sollte auch ich...? Andererseits hatte ich Skrupel, ferngesteuert aus dem Weißen Haus meine Perversionen zu entwickeln; ich wollte doch immer fest auf sozialistischer Grundlage stehen. (250- 251)

Even after Klaus begins to collaborate with the Stasi he remains preoccupied with American images. The lax characteristics he imagines are, of course, a cliché, but they turn him into a little swashbuckler who responds to the GDR’s rigid system with bold foolhardiness: “Ich werde im Stehen pinkeln und die Füße hochlegen und jedermann mit *Hi* begrüßen!” (132)

For youngsters in the GDR the pictures of America are, as we have seen, a ray of hope. However, an icon does not necessarily represent the truth behind the icon but rather the aura, the suggestive ideas emanating from it. Klaus’ imagined United States is comprised of modern myths. The American myth is the dissenter’s answer to the Communist myths. The story of the little trumpeter, the communists from Eisleben and

their flag (Brussig, *Helden* 99), or the socialist bonfires convey a feeling of security and personal vocation, but there is nothing behind the modern myth of the socialist hero: “Sie schwärmen noch heute vom wahren Sozialismus – aber sie meinen damit eigentlich ihre Lagerfeuergefühle” (Brussig, *Helden* 288).

In order to defend themselves dissenters created other myths and icons to denigrate socialism. In Brussig’s first novel *Wasserfarben*, the protagonist Anton develops his own American myth influenced by what the media has conveyed: crime stories about crooks in a ghetto illegally making big money:

Als ich ausstieg, bewegte ich mich wie in einem amerikanischen Film. Ich lief die Treppen runter und war mitten in der Bronx oder in Harlem oder so. Um mich herum nur finstere Typen. Jeder, der mir entgegenkam, war Killer oder Dealer oder beides. Ich war’n Killer, und ich sollte noch in dieser Nacht den Präsidenten umlegen und dann für drei Wochen nach Kalifornien verschwinden. Meine Pistole lag in meiner Manteltasche, und ich hatte den Finger schon am Abzug. (Brussig, *Wasserfarben* 135)

Anton impersonates an American felon, not so much considering the fact that a crime is happening here but that an individual transgresses the law and thus revolts against the authorities. What Anton cannot achieve in reality, he finds in his dreams of protest against the state. When Brussig creates figures like this he is not concerned to prove that there is crime in America. However, the images about America become the foil on which rebellion seems feasible. On the one hand we find the socialist hero, the “Held der Arbeit” who sacrifices his life to his beloved country,⁵² on the other hand there is the Western capitalistic hero who cannot be controlled by his state and behaves as he wishes.

⁵² In Christa Wolf’s *Der geteilte Himmel* there appears such a hero of work, Rolf Meternagel, who toils himself onto his own deathbed. However, Brussig pans Wolf and her novel in *Helden wie wir*’s last chapter.

The gangster boss is reinterpreted as an audacious and pugnacious figure that can prevail against the authorities. However, Brussig does not want his fellow citizens to be violent protesters. He envisions the “Helden wie wir” who are animated by their own imagination and then act as far as their powers go. The type of hero he postulates is neither the individualistic outlaw nor the socialist group hero but a responsible, thinking citizen who acts to make necessary changes without risking his or her own life. America, however, is the anti-image to socialist convictions that stoke feelings and arouse new ideas in people’s minds.

America in *Helden wie wir* connotes freedom and democracy as well as infallible justice. The United States is well-known for its highly developed judicial system which served as a model for West Germany after 1945. America provided an example of justice in the Nuremberg Trials. Germans in those days had a direct demonstration of how they could put hatred aside in favor of a just trial for the enemy. Americans assumed the role of judges in Europe. Brussig alludes to this role in two passages in *Helden wie wir*, with a twist. America is not the grand dispenser of liberty but a mighty judicial system, that has fallen into the wrong hands:

An unserem Eßtisch [in Klaus’s family] ereigneten sich Szenen wie in einem amerikanischen Schwurgericht! Ich war der Angeklagte und saß meinen Eltern gegenüber, die gleichzeitig Ankläger, Richter, Zeugen und die zwölf Geschworenen waren. (34)

Mir drohte nicht nur das amerikanische Schwurgericht, mir drohten die Nürnberger Prozesse. (75)

Klaus’ parents are his accusers. No legal advisor is granted to him. He is put in front of a biased court, dominated by a partisan group of plaintiffs, judges, and jurors. The

calamitous power of a tribunal threatens to eat up Klaus.⁵³ The consequences of jurisdictional power conflate with malignity. The American court is a mere model, but when it is filled with the wrong actors, the proceedings derail and impose a devastating verdict upon its victim. In this scene, the power is clearly on the side of the parents.

A major clash of contrasts occurs when Klaus refers to the famous American song “Born to be wild”.⁵⁴ His own version corresponds to his low social position: “Born to be a Toilettenverstopfer” (44). His environment does not give him the opportunity to flourish personally. He is a useless creature. Personal value does not derive from an unfolding of individual gifts and endowments but from the coercive state power. Klaus cannot marshal his traits and abilities to find his vocation. He cannot resist nor fend off the coercive system. Other people always decide for him, thus undermining his own will. The premeditated toilet blocking is his subversive protest against a mind-controlling tyranny. Klaus attempts to block the flow of a system by blocking its feces canals. The irony is that Klaus’ obsession results from his mother’s exaggerated hygiene. She taught him to keep his behind clean, but forgot that excessive hygiene harms the sewage system. Brussig subtly suggests that the excessive abuse of a principle – hygiene - leads to a dead end. Too much indoctrination therefore ‘constipates’ people’s mind and hampers the flow of the excretory products. Brussig documents the consequences of the political system in

⁵³ This situation is like a scene from the Volksgerichtshof and its chairman Roland Freisler. Earlier, Franz Kafka depicts in his novel “Der Prozeß” the protagonist Josef K. who is sentenced to death by a tribunal whose composition and rules are entirely opaque. The eerie feeling of being at the tribunal’s mercy paralyses the defendant and makes him unable to defend himself. Klaus is here in a similar situation.

⁵⁴ The song “Born to be wild” was released in 1968 by the American hard-rock band “Steppenwolf”. It evokes the feelings of the typically American idea of freedom one encounters with one’s motorcycle on a highway: “Get your motor runnin’ / Head out on the highway / Lookin’ for adventure ... Like a true nature’s child / We were born, born to be wild” (Steppenwolf). Ironically, the band’s name refers to Hermann Hesse’s book, a major pacemaker and source of inspiration for the ’68 movement. So the primordial American ideal of freedom expressed in these lines is somewhat based on a German. It is not clear that Brussig here really plays with this cultural crisscrossing.

many examples: Klaus' father, the evil spy working for the "Ministerium des Bösen" (Brussig, *Helden* 79), dies by digesting himself into a gigantic chunk of feces.⁵⁵ The collaborator not only poisons and infects other people, he perishes by the hatred he himself has sown and finishes his life as a piece of muck, unloved and abominated by his relatives. Klaus squeezes his dead father's testicle to take revenge (Brussig, *Helden* 268) on him.

Klaus also has to give blood for his government. His blood prolongs Honecker's life, ironically mirroring the perversion of the GDR secretary general who has now Klaus' perverted blood in his veins. However, the system literally taps its citizens and sucks out their vital power to strengthen its own violent might. The passage in which Klaus and his Stasi colleagues break into a writer's apartment and destroy a mirror to intimidate her reveals how the system spreads terror. This episode alludes directly to Christa Wolf's autobiographical narration *Was bleibt*, where a similar mirror scene occurs. Although Brussig mocks Wolf's political paralysis, her story is a gripping and nightmarish account of a persecuted writer whose life is wrecked by the Stasi. *Helden wie wir* can maintain its rambunctious humor, in *Was bleibt* there is no space for satirical somersaults. However, both books display the severe danger of the GDR's political system.

Is the United States the embodiment of the legendary splendid and immaculate ideal of freedom? Every legend, every myth has its hidden lies. The fabric of which idealized governmental models are woven always has flaws often invisible at first glance.

⁵⁵ Fecal matters matter in *Helden wie wir*: Klaus blocks toilets with his droppings and his father ends up as gigantic dropping.

The United States is hardly free of failures and embarrassing moments. There has been a long German literary tradition of criticizing, rebuking, even assaulting and reviling the United States from the post-war era until today. America has been criticized for its bellicose attitude, for its irresponsible audacity during the Cuba crisis, for its wrongdoings in the Vietnam war, and generally for its capitalistic throwaway society that infects other countries. German writers like Ernst von Salomon, Max Frisch or Rolf Hochhuth have depicted the controversial aspects of the land of the free and its ideal of democracy. Their findings expose mendacity underneath a crust of harmony and portray the fissure between ideals and reality. Besides serious critical views like these the German media have always railed at America, especially during war times.⁵⁶ Yet a negative critique of America is lacking in *Helden wie wir*. Thomas Brussig's view is atypical, exclusively underscoring the positive values of the United States. For him America serves as a contrasting system against which he can counterpose the communist government in East Germany. It is less a glorification of the American way of life than a useful counterweight to the flaws of a communist power. The depiction of America is the corrective lens through which recent German history is told in *Helden wie wir*.

Looking back on the whole 20th century the perspective is even clearer. After the Second World War America enabled the West Germans to create the economically successful FRG and live in wealth. Klaus's East German fate seems to require similar support. What Klaus is seeking in Mr. Kitzelstein's presence may be solace and mental support, not, of course, military intervention. Klaus condemns the system in which he lives: "Mr. Kitzelstein, ich rede vom Menschenbild des Totalitarismus" (98). After all,

⁵⁶ For the whole complex of negative America critique compare Wettberg 206-217, summarizing all main arguments of German authors criticizing the US. The book also contains single chapters about the aforementioned critical authors and their works.

Klaus and his creator Brussig alike opt for the Western governmental systems. It is not that they wish to glorify the West, but in the choice between oppression and freedom their decision is unequivocally clear. However, we do not know what Mr. Kitzelstein's reaction will be. He owes us an answer; is America really able to help?

The depiction of America is far more than literary adornment or political decoration. With the juxtaposition of the US and the GDR, Brussig deeply contemplates the realm of existential questions. This is food for thought for the reader who is cordially invited to think and find the answer that Mr. Kitzelstein does not give.

Der moderne Roman spiegelt nicht die Wirklichkeit, er entwirft Gegenmodelle, Relativierungssysteme, die offen sind nach vielen Seiten ... (Hillebrand 494)

III. Conclusion: Between Penis and Politics or Was Kläuschen nicht lernt, lernt Klaus nimmermehr?

Bruno Hillebrand's standard work on the theory of the novel, from which the quotation is taken, was published in 1980, 15 years before Brussig stirred the public with *Helden wie wir*. Hillebrand wanted to somehow characterize the entire body of post-1945 German literature. He was trying to find the lowest common denominator for literature so diverse that it can only be described by the vague term "literature after 1945". Rough and tentative as Hillebrand's perception is, it still fits a piece of recent German literature. *Helden wie wir* develops a counter model of reality. It does not mirror the actual historical situation but manipulates it in order to provide other perspectives. Brussig called his novel, in an interview with the *Spiegel*, a "Geschichtslüge" (Hage 255). This

premeditated historical lie is not meant to misguide its readers but to show alternatives. Brussig wants to make his readers think about the past as well as about the future. He is not a chronicler of history but an impish admonisher. The way he depicts alternative perspectives in his novel is mainly by means of the two topics this paper focuses on – sexuality and America. Both subjects open new doors for Klaus as well as the reader. His sexual perversions make him achieve the impossible, the destruction of the wall; his fantasies about America provide him with the necessary ideological dynamite.

Thomas Brussig brings sexuality and politics together in *Helden wie wir*. The fate of his oversexed protagonist Klaus mirrors the higher political fate of the former GDR. Klaus' sick sexuality sheds a bad light onto the country in which the driven, perverted protagonist lives and enables the reader to see through the network of indoctrination, corruption, and psychic torture. Klaus, helpless perpetrator and victim at the same time, attempts to overcome his miserable state of cowardice and defeatism with his penis. The discouraged homeboy turns out to be the sexual hero of the unification history. The depiction of sexuality always accompanies the political development of both its protagonist and a whole nation. In Klaus, the representative of an entire people, sexuality becomes intrusive. He is "einer von uns" but garners special importance because of his perversions. In him, politics become sexualized and sexuality becomes political. Brussig embroiders his work with many theoretical details. References to Sigmund Freud and Siegfried Schnabel in the text link Klaus's world to a broader theoretical realm and shows that Klaus is more than just a single case. The twist Brussig accomplishes by embedding Klaus's sexuality into a network of flanking areas like the aforementioned theoreticians, the mother-child constellation, the political references, the phase of adolescence,

integrates sexuality thoroughly into the novel's narrative structure and raises it to the height of an all-embracing central control element of *Helden wie wir*. Sexuality is thereby not only an embellishment on the protagonist's character but a complex motif which connects and interweaves the narrative strands. Its main aspect is the juxtaposition of self-destruction and self-realization. Klaus' sexuality will drive him towards one of these poles. The defective protagonist can either end up as a mentally destroyed psycho monster or completely shake off the fetters of perversion. Klaus chooses the latter one and frees himself by destroying the Berlin wall. Here Klaus' self-realization saves him and fulfills the author's (and probably many other people's) dream. Brussig himself stated: „Die Maueröffnung war das glücklichste Ereignis meines Lebens” (“Herr Brussig, was halten Sie von Nostalgie?”).

The danger of self-destruction or the reward of self-realization is offered to the poor pervert Klaus and, indeed, reaches to one whole nation. The people of the GDR were to choose between these two poles. In the novel, there is basically no separation between Klaus and his fellow countrymen. His fate is theirs. Had he failed, they would have failed as well. Klaus' penis becomes the “zentrale Punkt, von dem aus die DDR-Weltgeschichte im Innersten zusammengehalten wird” (Biermann). The most obvious transition from sexuality to politics is by means of the penis:

Brussigs grotesker Schelmenroman analogisiert hier explizit die ‘perverse Situation’ der deutschen Teilung und die Begehrensstruktur des Protagonisten: ... Die BRD wird darüber zur begehrten Frau, die zu deflorieren es besonderer phallischer Kräfte bedarf. Im auch in dieser Darstellung latent zugrunde liegenden Bild des Paares – und im Bild genitaler Sexualität – wird hier die Heilung vollzogen. (Brüns qtd. in Knobloch/Koopmann 207)

Here the conflict between East and West comes into play. The marital rite of reunification embodies the political convergence. The United States has contributed enormously to the real, legal unification of the two Germanys. Without the support of the only world power, Germany's negotiations with the Soviet Union would not have tilted in favor of Germany. Thus, Germany's fate after 1989 was more than a domestic affair. In his *Letter to Christa Wolf*, Jürgen Habermas underscored the involvement of the US and the Soviet Union in the whole separation process after the Second World War:

Not only in the Eastern but also in the Western parts of a torn and divided Germany that was rigorously screened off within itself, there was a process of conforming to the mentality and culture of the respective world powers that dominated both component states, accommodations that left their mark and led to different identities for East and West Germans. (Habermas 100)

People in both Germanys had developed different ideologies under the influences of the major opponents in the Cold War. Therefore, it was obvious that these powers would have their say when the separation of Germany was about to be repaired. Brüssig recognizes the American influence upon Germany's reunification in *Helden wie wir*. He does not only express his personal being in favor of the Western world but interweaves American pictures and culture into his novel. As we can see it in the novel as well as in daily life - American culture is global. Pictures about the US exist in all countries of the world and the subconscious effects are strong. Andreas Lehmann, an East German, tells about his personal encounter with the US:

Amerika produzierte nachhaltige Bilder, auch in den ostdeutschen Köpfen. Die Bilder mögen abgegriffen sein, aber sie sind da: Straßenschluchten, Weite, Times Square, Freiheitsstatue, Highways, dicke Autos,, Golden Gate Bridge, Grand Canyon. Amerika schafft moderne Mythen. Daß uns die nicht loslassen, hat nicht nur etwas mit der Wucht der den Rest der Welt

überkommenden amerikanischen Pop-Kulturindustrie zu tun. Sondern damit, daß es in Amerika eine Atmosphäre gibt, die das zuläßt und die so was schafft – und danach sehnen wir uns wahrscheinlich auch manchmal. (9)

In *Helden wie wir* America is more than a cultural reference. Klaus's confession to Kitzelstein reveals the deep connection between the US and Germany. The United States is an important political advisor for the Germany at the end of the 20th century. The role it assumed during and after the Second World War is continued. Klaus seeks help, judgment, and support from the United States, not West Germany. Brussig makes his protagonist convey the Eastern part of the German reunification to the Western allies. The America is shown as being interested in the fate of the people behind the wall.

Brussig's inclination toward America has a literary as well as a political dimension. He has been profoundly influenced by American authors like J. D. Salinger, Charles Bukowski, John Irving, and especially Philip Roth (Simanowski 162). As we have seen Roth's novel *Portnoy's Complaint* is the key text for understanding *Helden wie wir*.

How does Brussig's novel fit into contemporary German literature? *Helden wie wir* brims with sexuality, that is, however, is typical for a whole generation of recent Berlin writers. Gerstenberger summarizes: "The descriptions of sexual pleasure or trauma serve to translate incisive political developments into literary interpretations of these events" (Gerstenberger, *Play Zones* 270). Berlin was (and still is) a magnifying glass for the trauma of a divided Germany. However, location does not play a preeminent role in *Helden wie wir*. Of course, the wall appears in the end, but the threat and fear it spurred, the huge concrete chunks, the odious security measures are not well evoked in Brussig's

book. The novel is not visual nor does it resurrect famous locations in Berlin. Therefore, *Helden wie wir* could take place at any place on the border between the two Germanies. Of course, the den of evil, the Ministry of State Security headquarters, appears, but all other venues are not specific to Berlin.⁵⁷ Instead Brussig presents numerous doll characters: whimsical Stasi collaborators, an obsessed mother, subservient intellectuals, malignant physicians, perverts, wankers, models, prominent politicians as well as ordinary people. Germany and America are represented by characters not by scenery. Ronald Reagan and Oscar Kitzelstein are juxtaposed with Erich Honecker and Christa Wolf. *Helden wie wir* is not a book about places but people, scrutinizing the way they change. Yet, the reader meets unchanging characters like Klaus's mother or the representatives of the state. Honecker and his subordinates are doomed to failure because of their rigidity. Of interest for Brussig are the characters who are able to throw old failures overboard and turn over a new leaf. The extreme embodiment of this change is the protagonist Klaus himself.

There remains the question of whether Klaus's change is real or spurious. Markus Wolf, the former chief of the foreign intelligence service of the Ministry of State Security of the GDR, allegedly underwent such a fake change. He, the communist spy out of conviction, made an about-turn and attempted to integrate himself into West German society. His autobiography *Man without a Face* was supposed to make him presentable to the capitalistic world:

⁵⁷ For background information about the famous settings of Berlin, which are a backdrop for the events in the novel, compare Wolfrum, Steinbach, Flamm, Seibt, and Chatelier. Especially Wolfrum's article on the Berlin wall clarifies the terror and inhumanity behind this construction. Two hundred and thirty-nine fugitives who attempted to reach West Germany found their death. Its physical appearance with a mix of concrete, barbed wire fences, the so-called death stripe, watch towers, and automatic shooting appliances embodied the divided Germany's fate in all its cruelty.

My life's work, committed to the ideal of socialism, was crumbling before my eyes. My own country, East Germany, which had failed to live up to the demanding title German Democratic Republic, was facing a shotgun marriage with Europe's economic powerhouse, West Germany. The process of winding up an independent East Germany was already under way, and though I did not know what a unified Germany would mean for Europe, I knew one thing very well: I was about to become a wanted man. (Wolf 3)

Wolf's description parallels Klaus's fate. The Stasi man wants to assume a new role in the Western world. Acknowledging that the former values of his home country are crumbling, Wolf still can see himself as a desirable person. Klaus Uhltscht and Markus Wolf are both megalomaniacs. Wolf's role in the former GDR is, however, a far gloomier than Klaus's. As key figure of the Stasi machinery he spied on people, concocted schemes, and encouraged his employees to do the devil's business. Wolf, describing himself as masterspy, is proud of his achievements. Klaus, too, has committed evil deeds, but then overcomes his mistakes and takes the pivotal step by opening the wall. However, both characters, the real and the fictitious, find a new 'career' in the West by telling the Western world their biographies. Brussig depicts in his protagonist not a single, unique personality but a collective fate. The East Germans were to integrate the new Western world into their view, not the other way round. Klaus shows us a satiric example of accomplishing this. However, his process of recognizing failures and misbehavior makes him soar above the heads of GDR relics like Markus Wolf. The inclination toward the Western world in general and the United States in particular enables Klaus and his country to develop their future. Wolf & Co. cannot play that role. Klaus, however, is the personification of a tremendous change. He rises from an

obsequious and misguided subject to an active and knowing citizen. The pubescent pervert turns into a penile politician.

Helden wie wir is surely not the long-awaited “Wenderoman” that explains why things happened in Germany in 1989/90 as they did. However, Brussig’s novel is far more than a mere sexual satire. It is a book about politics luring its readers into thinking further themselves. The novel is entertaining and educating at the same time. By thinking and acting a change is possible, as we can see in the protagonist Klaus – Was Kläuschen nicht lernt, lernt Klaus sehr wohl!

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