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In Search of Real Fathers: Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*
and *Vater, Mutter, Mörderkind*

Michelle Schwoebel

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

In Search of Real Fathers: Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*
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Plenzdorf's works, one written before the fall of socialism in the German Democratic Republic (hereafter referred to as the DDR), and one after, portray relationships between fathers and sons, which act as a metaphor to express a personal perspective of the state, revealing that the DDR was neither as repressive or as omnipresent for the average citizen as outsiders are often given to believe. The father, or *Übervater*, a figure deeply rooted in the German consciousness, is represented by the state and proves itself as an entity which gives the protagonists in both works little notice, despite their best efforts to seek out a paternalistic presence.

Keywords: Ulrich Plenzdorf, DDR, East Germany, fathers, sons, families

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Introduction

Citizens of the German Democratic Republic were no strangers to oppression, even prior to the formation of their state in 1949. In particular, those who were affiliated with the communist party during the brutal Third Reich of Hitler were subjected to persecution, internment, and even death. Ulrich Plenzdorf, one of these citizens, was born in 1934 into a family who had experienced just such circumstances—his parents were in and out of prison at intervals throughout the Third Reich due to their participation in the KPD, the German Communist Party. Despite these difficulties, Plenzdorf's family retained their communist convictions after the war, and consequently Plenzdorf lived most of his life under the communist regime of East Germany. An avowed yet critical party member, he never attempted to leave East Germany and remained even after the fall of the Berlin Wall. After the reunification he continued to publish works reflecting his communist beliefs. Better known as a screenwriter than a novelist, he wrote unceasingly after the fall of the wall and was one of the rare East German authors to do so and be published. He was the author of twenty works in the span of three decades.

In this essay I will undertake to explain how two of Plenzdorf's works, in particular: *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* and *Vater, Mutter, Mörderkind*, use the family as a political metaphor. I will address the role of the state within the metaphor as a type

of father, as well as the symbolic value of sons and children. The search for both the physical and the metaphorical father is a central theme in both works: the lead characters in both novels are fatherless young men living in the DDR.

In the words of Hüppauf, who supports the significance of familial symbolism in DDR literature and the author's pivotal role in propagating this view:

Declarations of loyalty," "engagement," and "worldview" not only assured that writers were morally entangled in the system and behaved like members of an extended family (Biermann); they also produced an aesthetic "entanglement" in the politically determined system of this extended family. Literature's place was always already defined in advance, and its position vis-à-vis the *Übervater* determined the rules of the game. ...The authorities' positions remained intact and the patricide did not take place, not even in symbolic disguise. The revolt of the aesthetic never occurred. (Hüppauf 222-223)

The significance of this is that Plenzdorf's status as an author meant that he acted as an extension of the state in a certain degree; as such, he could no longer completely throw off the metaphor of the *Übervater* than he could run through the streets criticizing socialism. Because the role of the author was determined in the DDR, he was constrained to the vocabulary and parameters allowed him by the state. So integral was

the idea of the state being represented by fathers, that the death or murder of the father, might be perceived as a metaphorical attacking on state. In spite of these constraints, Plenzdorf paints a picture of an *Übervater* that is all his own. Careful analysis of both Plenzdorf's works and comparable volumes will betray a startling lack of patriarchy, which is all the more alarming for the expectation that the political situation would provide both of our protagonists with an omnipresent father figure. In stark contrast with that expectation, Plenzdorf's figures present the reader with an *Übervater* who is not only powerful, but powerfully absent in the lives of ordinary citizens

Historical Background

Plenzdorf's most famous book, *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*—written first as a drama, then a screenplay, then a book—was published in 1973. It was immediately recognizable, in part, due to another well-known title: Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. The protagonist, Edgar Wibeau, is a hyper-sensitive young man, living in the countryside and falling in love with a woman he can never have. He elects to live outside of conventional society, fleeing the responsibility and constraints of East German culture and taking up residence in an abandoned apartment. Although Edgar eventually makes the decision to re-enter society, the book ends in tragedy, with Edgar's ambiguous death—an accident he may or may not have wished to avoid.

Plenzdorf originally had no intention of publishing the book. Although he was a died in the wool communist, he, like Wolf, Braun, Müller and many others, “hatte seinen neuen Werther ‘in der Schublade’ lassen müssen“ (Emmerich 246). At the time Plenzdorf completed the book, the cultural and political authorities were censoring any work apparently critical of the government, regardless of the author’s political leanings. The East German censors are often compared to those in Nazi Germany (Boyer 515), but they took their cues from the Allunionskongress der Sowjetschriftsteller of 1934. The degree to which the example of the USSR was embraced is reflected in the words of Erich Honecker in 1951 during a meeting of the Zentralkomitee: “Die Kultur der ruhmreichen Sowjetunion ist für uns beispielgebend! Wir müssen die sowjetischen Beschlüsse genau studieren, denn auch auf diesem Gebiet heißt für uns: ‘Von der Sowjetunion lernen, heißt siegen lernen“ (Groth 24).

Despite the clarity of the origin of the DDR’s policies, Boyer points out that the methodologies of East Germany and Nazi Germany are astoundingly similar. Both regimes sought to produce homogeneity of thought in their people by creating a unified, governmental voice (Boyer 519). After the dissolution of the DDR, East German authors consistently used the comparison between East Germany and Nazi Germany to convey the intensity of the political atmosphere and the dangers of open dissent. In both regimes there was a single official viewpoint on all things intellectual and ideological.

The authorities within the SED were careful to discourage diversity of thought and eliminate prominent contradictory voices, whose very existence could be interpreted as a failure of socialism. Joachim-Rüdiger Groth explains: "Eindeutigkeit im Sprachgebrauch, so schlußfolgerte die Partei, sei Ausdruck der Eingleisigkeit im Denken" (Groth 156). By producing an environment of ideological polarization, the state hoped to maintain the ideological high ground: every criticism could be construed as an attack against socialism, and punished as treason. Robert Havemann, a dissident but loyal East German intellectual, underscores this when he finishes relating an anecdote from a Parteikonferenz with the Politbüro in the Friedrichstadtpalast with the following conclusion, "...Es war ganz klar, daß alle, die gegen sie Kritik geübt hatten, vom Standpunkt des Politbüros aus Verräter, Dummköpfe, Schädliche und Leute waren, die im Auftrag des Westens in verbrecherischer Weise gegen den Aufbau des Sozialismus kämpften" (Groth 32). The SED was establishing a 'party line' in an endeavor to channel individual expression and act as a mechanism for the national consciousness.

When an artist's work did not reflect the views of the SED, it was not allowed to reach the public. For instance, the opera *Lukullus* (1951) co-authored by Bertolt Brecht and Paul Dessau was barred from performance and publication due to a lack of

“ideologischer Klarheit” (Groth 23). In an address to the Zentralkomitee, Honecker spoke regarding Lukullus and said the following with regard to the power of culture:

...wenn ich euch mitteile, daß eine Operninszenierung Hunderttausende von Mark kostet und später auch von Zehntausenden Menschen gesehen und gehört wird, daß ein guter oder schlechter Spielfilm viele Millionen Menschen erreicht, und wenn ich daran erinnere, wie viele Werktätige ein großes Wandbild in einer öffentlich zugänglichen Halle wie der des Bahnhofs Friedrichstraße betrachten – dann begreift jeder, wie wichtig Kultur und Kunst für uns sind. (Groth 24)

Honecker was acutely aware of the power and influence of art, and the SED felt that their financial stake in cultural and artistic endeavors permitted them the right to censor and control the publication and performance of any artwork. In another example from Brecht, *Katzgraben* (1953) adhered to both political and aesthetic values of the SED. The West German magazine *Der Spiegel*, criticized it as “...das längst erwartete Brechtsche Propaganda-Drama, voll von halben Wahrheiten und ganzen Lügen.” Surprisingly, however, East German critics panned the production as well, lambasting it for not fulfilling ideological expectations. Harsh criticism and extensive censorship such as this resulted in a body of works that overwhelmingly carried a pro-state message. Nothnagle further explains the prevailing attitude in terms of *Parteilichkeit*:

According to the SED, "Parteilichkeit is... a theoretical-methodological principle; it demands that one approach all questions of societal life from the standpoint of the interests of the working class, its struggle for peace, societal progress, and the establishment of Socialism and Communism."

Since the SED was the "party of the working class," Parteilichkeit literally meant the strict subordination of all political, intellectual, and cultural activity to the Party's directives. Stated simply, "the Party is always right".

(Nothnagle 17)

Thus, the expectation for artists and authors was that their works ought to always advance the agenda and views of the SED. It was not enough to write an epic novel or play. The standard was an epic novel or play about man's struggle for equality and freedom from oppression, resolved by triumphal implementation of party principles.

Like all DDR literature, Plenzdorf's works were subject to the standard of Parteilichkeit, and had to be evaluated by the censors to determine their orthodoxy.. Although he began writing the novel in 1968, he did not believe that *Die neuen Leiden* would ever have made it through the censorship process. Thematic elements in the book—attitudes toward authority, the strong individualistic streak prominently displayed in the actions of the protagonist, as well as the decidedly unhappy ending—all led Plenzdorf to shelve the book without hope of the public ever being able to access

it. That reluctance to publish was grounded in decades of evidence that the SED would challenge any dissenting voices, regardless of how “friendly” the criticism may have been intended to be.

Fortunately for Plenzdorf, 1971 brought a new political climate and changed circumstances surrounding the censorship in East Germany. The impetus for the change was none other than Erich Honecker, the political mind behind the Berlin wall, who took Walter Ulbricht’s place as First Secretary of the SED Central Committee and Chairman of the National Defense Council. Honecker was a proponent of the arts who criticized “Oberflächlichkeit, Äußerlichkeit, und Langeweile”, and made overtures to the artists of West Germany. His ascendancy led to the short-lived ‘golden era’ of DDR literature, as he attempted to cultivate a public image of openness and encouragement, and censorship consequently took a momentary backseat to artistic expression. During this time, he made concerted efforts to court prominent cultural figures within the DDR, ushering in a Goethe-Feier and inviting artists in the DDR to produce new publications, plays, films, poems, and music—all, admittedly, to the glorification of the DDR, yet with some allowance made for the individual style of the artist. Honecker explained his policy in a plenary address at the fourth Zentralkomitee in December of ’71:

Wenn man von der festen Position des Sozialismus ausgeht, kann es meines Erachtens auf dem Gebiet von Kunst und Literatur keine Tabus

geben. Das betrifft sowohl die Fragen der inhaltlichen Gestaltung als auch des Stils—kurz gesagt: die Frage dessen, was man die künstlerische Meisterschaft nennen kann (Groth 93).

These comments opened a door for artists, which heretofore had been closed and bolted; instead of being held to the rigid constraints of *Parteilichkeit*, they were given freer rein with both content and style. This freedom allowed artists to publish works that heretofore would have been forbidden. Friedrich Ott explained the impact of Honecker's remarks as follows: "... [He] gave the green light to art and literature, proclaiming that there should be no taboos of form or content, as long as the works were solidly based on socialist principles. The caveat was sufficiently vague" (234).

The lack of specific strictures was the perfect opportunity for the publication of *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, which appeared in 1972 as a drama in two parts, with a book edition in 1973. After five years of courting the arts, Honecker's policy on censorship was finally deemed too counterproductive and less-flexible policies, like those instituted in the 60s were reinstated (Groth 117). Fortunately, the intervening period proved wonderfully productive. Plenzdorf's work was performed across the DDR, and he succeeded in introducing a rebellious youth hero into the East German repertoire.

Political background has similar significance for the second work by Plenzdorf that I will be discussing: *Vater, Mutter, Mörderkind*. Published in 1994, five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, this screenplay relates the story of a young man's experiences after the fall of the wall; the young man, Karl, has grown up communist, and the fall of the wall is the beginning of a major crisis for him. His entire world view is challenged as East Germany is westernized. This westernization of Karl's home is a vital part of the story; in fact, the work opens with a scene portraying some of the changes which are occurring.

The publication environment changed drastically in East German after 1989, and competition replaced censorship as the primary concern of East German authors. This was not entirely a good thing. Despite the difficulties of creative efforts in the DDR, artists enjoyed a privileged position. The state had supported artistic endeavors with billions of marks during the course of its existence. At the time of the fall of the wall, there were 17,000 libraries, 65 theatres (many who supported two or three different troupes), nine puppet theaters, ten cabarets, 87 orchestras, 751 museums and 861 'houses of culture'. Within two years after Germany's reunification, half of the libraries were gone, as well as more than fifty percent of the 'houses of culture', youth clubs, and movie theaters. The majority of museums, theaters, operas, and orchestras managed to hang on until 1994 due to the continued support of the government, after which many

of these suffered a similar fate (Emmerich 437). The advent of capitalism impacted the book market in an equally dramatic manner: the markets in the east were suddenly open for business to the western authors, and the marketplace was flooded by a sea of options. By March 1990, bookstores which had previously been able to count on about 6,500 new titles a year suddenly had an overwhelming choice of 60,000 plus titles from which to select (Emmerich 438). At the same time, privatization of many of these stores was being implemented and West German corporations were taking possession of the formerly state-owned outlets. Between their capitalistic mindset and the ties they held to western publishing companies, East German authors were at a disadvantage. The combination of these factors impacted eastern authors detrimentally and, ultimately, crowded many of them out of the marketplace.

Yet another difficulty in the post-unification period is that, whereas the DDR had created an environment where reading, attendance at the opera and theater, and an education in the classics was supported and encouraged, the dissolution of the DDR led to the disappearance of the pressure to participate in cultural pastimes. In the words of Emmerich, “Kein Druckgenehmigungsverfahren und keine Distributionssteuerung griffen mehr ein. Jetzt las schöne Literatur nur noch, wer an ihr literarisch interessiert war” (Emmerich 447). Thus, the struggle for authors after the disintegration of their state was an increasingly indifferent attitude in the public toward works of socialist

high culture. Citizens of the DDR were swimming in a new world of books, heretofore closed to them: volumes by American and West German authors, as well as books about travel, hobbies, and politics were instantly popular, in part, due to their previously taboo status. No longer constrained by a lack of choice, or the pressure of the state, readers were choosing lowbrow literature, which meant that they were not choosing DDR authors.

A contributing factor to the changing buying habits of consumers was that East German authors were often publishing works with which the general public simply did not agree. While many authors and intellectuals argued for a different kind of socialism, and wished to preserve portions of East Germany's structure and culture, average citizens often wished simply to be able to shake off the constraints and pressures of East Germany and make a new future for themselves. They threw themselves into all things western—some of them quite literally, as mass exodus to the west occurred and an economy of consumption was embraced. Ostalgie only emerged later, gradually, as the disappointments of unemployment and a lack of social programs set in. The sudden and overwhelming influx of Western authors into the Eastern marketplace after the fall of the wall was ultimately the death blow for many established, socialist writers. It is in this setting that Plenzdorf wrote and published *Vater, Mutter, Mörderkind*.

The Figure of the Father

Central to the interpretation of Plenzdorf's works is the figure of the family, and particularly the father. Plenzdorf's protagonist in *Die neuen Leiden*, Edgar Wibeau, grows up in a single-parent household; his father divorced his mother and left the family when he was very young, contacting Edgar only with an occasional postcard. As a teenager, fleeing the repressive atmosphere of his home, Edgar seeks his father out and finds him living with a young woman in a penthouse, having evidently been able to leave both him and his mother behind with little trouble. Due to the estrangement of his father, he has fantasized and dreamed about him from his youngest years. He becomes a touchstone for Edgar in his troubled moments, wherein the young man imagines his father as an artist, a hero, an individualist, a bohemian, and a genius—the progeny of the Huguenots. Even his eventual face-to-face meeting with his real father is not enough to dissuade him to let go entirely of his imagined father. Instead of confronting reality, he eschews introductions and immerses himself in his role as a heating engineer. At one point he completely lets go of reality, launching into an improbable daydream of a life wherein he moves in with his father and his father's girlfriend, telling himself: "Ich konnte mir sofort vorstellen, wie wir zu dritt gelebt hätten" (107).

Karl, the central character in *Vater, Mutter, Mörderkind* has likewise grown up without his father. Karl's birth father was absent his entire life but when he was three, Julius, Karl's adoptive figure enters the picture. Julius is a former member of the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) whose prior activities cause him to be taken into custody and imprisoned after the fall of the wall. Karl thus struggles with the same problem as Edgar: that of a fatherless home. At first glance the reader may assume that at the root of Karl's struggles are the West and its role in removing Karl's adoptive father from his home. However, a closer look reveals that the absence of his birth father and its symbolic import is the true source of his problems. This is evidenced in his relationships with others: his interactions with Überlaut are a prime example. Überlaut is an authority of the new regime whom Karl meets as a result of Julius' imprisonment. The relationship between Karl and Überlaut is formed because of similarities between Karl's birth father and the old guard: both were soldiers during World War II and Überlaut lived in Karl's hometown for some time during the war. It is these parallels to the birth father which causes Karl to turn to him as a paternal figure, despite the contradictory positions of the two as jailor and son of a criminal.

The search for the father is not unique to Plenzdorf's works; indeed, the father plays an important role in East Germany's political mythology. For example, Willi Bredel makes use of the father in his *Verwandte und Bekannte* (1941-53) trilogy,

wherein the protagonist, Walter Brenten searches for substitute father figures. Because his 'real' father, Carl, is inadequate, Walter seeks paternal guidance in mentors who serve as a metaphor for the state. Otto Gotsche also relied heavily upon the relationships between fathers and sons, as seen in his work, *Die Fahne von Kriwoj Rog* (1961). The Brosowski family is entrusted with a Red Flag, which they shelter and defend, all against the backdrop of Hitler's Germany. Brosowski's fathers stand in for the state, while his sons represent the working class (Gotsche 88). While Plenzdorf's novels did not paint the East German government in the most flattering of colors, Bredel and Gotsche's works were overwhelmingly pro-state. The first book in the *Verwandte* trilogy, *Die Väter*, was even compulsory reading in the DDR. Even more extreme than Bredel and Gotsche, Heiner Müller's *Der Vater* (1959) presents a desire for communist fathers so strong that the main character articulates the wish to replace his Nazi parents with parents that are communist (Hell 110). Upon the arrest of the father by "strangers... in brown uniforms" (Müller 20), the communist son seeks to take the father's place, quite literally, by usurping his parent's room for the scene of a tryst. In Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, the young protagonist Nelly recalls her father's return from a prisoner-of-war camp, and is deeply shaken by the changes she observes in him. He is no longer her father, but a "stranger" (Wolf 518). Instead of pride, she feels shame; in place of familiar warmth, there is embarrassment and pity. Seeing her father as a failure is the catalyst for a shift in the way in which Nelly views herself—the failure of

the father leaves her adrift. This relationship between Nelly and her father can be projected upon the relationship of Germans to their state. Using the family as a metaphor, Wolf is indicating how the disempowerment of the state impacts the citizens of that state. A host of other East German authors utilize familial symbolism in the same way, with the father figure as a representation of the state and the family, most often the children, as a metaphor for the citizens. Becker's *Jakob der Lügner*, Marchwitza's *Kumiaks*, essays by Lukács, poems by Mayakovsky, and many other works reflect the importance of the father-figure in East German literature.

The association of a father as a protector and a representation of security was particularly important in Germans' minds coming out of World War II. Hitler's preoccupation with the concept of an Aryan race led to the family and an individual's heritage becoming a very charged topic; an individual knew who he was based upon his or her parentage. Hell speaks of select authors who took the opportunity to "break with the 'fathers'" (31), but mentions that such a move was an exception to the rule. For the most part, these strong associations presented an opportunity for the SED, which they capitalized upon, to present itself as an idealized father, in order to appeal to the public's desire to have a protector and a connection to something familiar in the wake of the war and its horrific aftermath. This idealized father figure is heavily influenced by the Soviet national 'fathers': Lenin and Stalin, which enables the search for him to

function as a metaphor for the larger search for an East German father. In Katerina Clark's words: "Soviet society's leaders became 'fathers' (with Stalin as the patriarch); the national heroes, model "sons"; the state, a "family" (Hell 114-15).

In addition to providing an image representing strength, the SED's choice to use Soviet fathers as a pattern communicated a figure that was distant: the Soviet father was a type of *Übervater*: powerful, yet beyond reach. Papenfuss Gorek, a Prenzlauer Berg poet whose father served as an East German general reinforces the estrangement-aspect of father relationships. In the following description given in an interview after the fall of the wall, he compares the Soviet-influenced state to his father: "The distance... is too great... He is an abstract quantity to me like 'the state' or 'the system' or 'the army'" (Von Hallberg 280). Although the idea of the state as a father was relatable, it is important to remember that the state was presented as a type of father, rather than an actual father.

In an effort to legitimize itself to its own people, as well as the greater theater of Europe and the world, the DDR attempted to build legends and create a perception that they were a country with deep roots, a culture of art, and connectivity to the present day. To that end they subsidized theaters, operas, and symphonies. Jugendtagen were hosted on an annual basis, highlighting composers, playwrights, and poets who advanced the metaphor of the state as a father and loyal citizens as favored sons.

Freedom/resistance fighters and anti-fascism activists were celebrated for their glories deeds, which were transfigured into historic events by the government. Stories of the worker-heroes who had built and were building the country were told, retold, and aggrandized. In spite of all of these efforts, however, the idea of the Soviet or DDR father was always bigger than the thing itself. The problem with that is that such a construct cannot withstand the harsh light of day, and prolonged exposure to the reality of the object of obsession (the father figure/government) inevitably erodes the fantasy. After prolonged exposure to the idea of an *Übervater* and the reality of the DDR, citizens were forced to remodel the construct or discard it, entirely.

Summation

With paternal mythology playing such an important role in DDR political and literary culture, it is striking that natural fathers are missing in both of Plenzdorf's works. I would argue that the lack of fathers suggests that in Plenzdorf's eyes the problem with the DDR was not one of an oppressive, omnipresent state, but rather, that of an absent one. Good, staunch communists had to grapple with a lack of paternal presence, as opposed to a scrutinizing patriarchy. The difficulties and disappointments Karl and Edgar, and thus compliant DDR citizens, endure as a result are doubly disappointing. They were offered a father figure, based upon the Soviet state father, and yet that father was not really there. The state was undoubtedly powerful, which

reflected the DDR's desire to represent a type of *Übervater*, but they were also very distant; despite their power to intervene in Edgar and Karl's lives, the state evidenced little desire to do so.

The effect of this disappointment is crushing. Throughout *Vater, Mutter, Mörderkind* we see a combination of rejecting the state for its inability to provide the structure sought therein, and its failure to provide for its people the emotional meaning it falsely promised them. Stalin, the SED, and the leaders of East Germany at all levels did not fulfill their promise of perfection. And like the father figures sought by the two protagonists, the communist construct proved a forgery when held up to the light. By any other name, the *Übervater* was nothing more than empty promises and political posturing. The same corruption and failure which the East German government was quick to accuse West Germany of, was very close to home for the East German people.

Chapter 1: Storm and Stress vs. Socialism: the Sorrows of Werther and Edgar

While Plenzdorf's book has obvious connections to Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, there are also ample and pronounced differences between the two texts. Some distinctions strike the reader immediately, such as the death of the main character. In Goethe's novel it is meticulously planned and carried out, while Plenzdorf's protagonist apparently undergoes a completely accidental death. In regards to the death scene in *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, Ternes makes note of the political climate of the DDR and suggest that it is a determining factor in the difference between the two books (93). Frenzel agrees inasmuch as she indicates that the political context muddies the death sufficiently to create two camps, one of which espouses the belief that the death was, after all, intentional (338). The most important difference of all, however, comes from the presence, or lack of presence of fatherly force in the novels: while father figures abound in both novels, they are impotent in Plenzdorf's work. So important is this distinction, that some scholars, including Hunnicutt and Fickert, have suggested that other authors, not Goethe, are the primary template for Plenzdorf's character¹. Others disagree, citing as proof both the title, as well as the main character, who they perceive to be, "...ein wissentlicher und willentlicher Nachfahre von Goethes erfolgreicher Romanfigur, dem jungen Werther" (Wolpers 321). Whatever contemporary influences

¹ Fickert associates Plenzdorf's work with contemporary youth culture novels, suggesting both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Catcher in the Rye* as alternatives to *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* as Plenzdorf's template (69). Hunnicutt echoes Fickert's suggestion of *Catcher in the Rye* (13).

Plenzdorf may have referenced, the connection to Goethe's work is undeniable: aside from the blatant reference in the title, the similarities between characters are not to be mistaken: Werther and Wibeau, Charlotte and Charlie, and William and Willi are obvious parallels. Additionally, Edgar and Werthers' stories are, at their root a story of man vs. society.

In confronting the differences between the two works, it is necessary to introduce a brief summary of both works. Goethe's story is a one-sided epistolary novel, beginning with a note from the "editor" who has collected Werther's letters, written to his bosom-friend, Wilhelm. Werther has gone to Wahlheim, which is a pleasant place much to his taste, and a refuge from an uncomfortable situation at home with his mother. All goes well till Werther meets Lotte. According to the immediately-smitten Werther, Lotte is the very model of a perfect woman: she is modest and motherly, while at the same time being fashionably sensitive to poetry and nature. We meet her first in a scene which could have been pulled from a picture book portraying an idealized mother: Lotte is cutting bread for her eight younger siblings gathered eagerly about her. Further letters to Wilhelm show that Werther finds her to be kind and patient, as affectionate with her friends as she is with her family, and an enthusiastic reader of poetry and lover of the natural world. Werther falls into love with her quite recklessly, despite having been warned that she is engaged.

Werther's real troubles begin as he falls deeper and deeper into love with Lotte associating with her and her family ever more frequently. He shows tendencies toward self-destructive behavior: his letters to Wilhelm are littered with hints and declarations of his desire to suicide on account of his love for Lotte. She belongs to another man so he can never have her, yet because he knows no moderation he cannot stay away from her. He takes employment away from Wahlheim for a time, but eventually succumbs to an irresistible desire to be near her again. This leads to marital troubles between Albert and Lotte, and events come to a head shortly before Christmas, at which time Werther decides to commit suicide. At this time he also expresses his desire by kissing Lotte, passionately, to her great consternation. She sends him away, refusing to speak to him after a final notice that this is the last time they will ever see one another. He takes his leave and sends a note to Albert, asking for the use of his pistols, explaining that he is about to take a journey. He writes a final farewell to add to the letters he has written over the period of time in which he has orchestrated his death. Therein he leaves instructions as to his burial, including sufficient material to leave Lotte and Albert disturbed for the rest of their lives.

Plenzdorf's novel is a fascinating mixture of similarities and contrasts to Goethe's work. The book opens with notice of a young man's death: Edgar Wibeau. The reader is then made privy to a series of conversations between Wibeau's estranged father and

various persons with whom Edgar interacted in the days and months leading up to his demise. These discussions, an attempt on the part of Edgar's father to make sense of Edgar's life and death, are viewed retrospectively and they are interspaced by the content of recordings sent from Edgar to his friend, Willi—a modern take on Werther's letters. This is all consistent with Goethe's template, until the narrations are interrupted by the indignant voice of the deceased Edgar, commenting from the grave on the various events and the accounts given by his intimates. The reader discovers that in life Edgar had been writing letters to Willi from Berlin, where he stayed temporarily, fleeing from a situation with his teacher, upon whose toe he dropped a heavy metal plate. He also distanced himself from his controlling mother, who determined his education, his grades and even attempting to 'break' him of being left-handed, leaving off only when he began to wet the bed. Willi initially accompanies Edgar on his journey, but when Willi expresses the desire to return home, Edgar refuses to accompany him, opting instead to camp out in the condemned apartment that Willi's family left behind when they moved to Mittenberg.

Shortly after Edgar's move into Willi's old apartment, Charlie is introduced. Charlie is a kindergarten teacher at the school directly adjacent to the apartment complex where Edgar is staying and the first person Edgar meets after moving into the apartment. Her interactions with the children place her into an obvious mother-role and

Edgar becomes infatuated with her, spending as much time in and around the kindergarten as possible. Like Werther with Lotte's siblings, Edgar uses the children for whom Charlie is responsible as a means to access her. Charlie, however, keeps her distance, as she is older and engaged to a man who has been long absent because of military service. After the return of Charlie's fiancé to Berlin, Edgar backs off in order to take up employment. He eventually returns to Charlie after her marriage and at one point crosses the line and kisses her.

The last part of the narrative focuses mostly on his work as a manual laborer with a group of painters in Berlin. He works for a time before fighting with his boss and temporarily leaving the group. He returns, but during his hiatus Edgar has decided to create a new kind of paint-spraying machine in order to make his mark as a proletarian hero. He harbors the secret ambition of triumphantly presenting his invention to his boss, Addi, who has been making attempts to build a similar machine before Edgar's arrival. His attempt to build the machine and embarrass Addi ultimately end in his death, as Edgar makes a fatal mistake with the wiring. His story ends with little fanfare: his own father declaring that he has no more an idea of who Edgar was at the end of his inquiries than he had when he began.

Even those brief summaries show that the novels invite comparison. Both novels begin with an outside perspective: Werther's novel opens with a note to the reader from

the editor, while Edgar's story is first introduced by a series of obituaries. From there we learn that both Werther and Edgar are fleeing uncomfortable circumstances at home. Edgar refuses to make a public apology for the incident with his teacher, and Werther is escaping close-quarters with his mother, whom he cannot stand, as well as a situation in which a woman had formed an undesired attachment to him. They both undertake to leave their respective hometowns, and the journey serves a double purpose: not only will they be able to escape the responsibilities awaiting them at home, they will be able to live unfettered; free to pursue the footloose lifestyle which so appeals to them. Edgar describes the moment in which he began to understand his freedom: "Dann fing ich erst an zu begreifen, daß ich ab jetzt machen konnte, wozu ich Lust hatte. Daß mir keiner mehr reinreden konnte. Daß ich mir nicht mal mehr die Hände zu waschen brauchte vorm Essen, wenn ich nicht wollte. „ (29) This ecstatic revelry in freedom points to the fact that in the apartment in Berlin he has full control over himself and his decisions for perhaps the first time in his life. He is drunk with freedom and refuses to even contact his mother, choosing instead to correspond with his best friend, who has been instructed to tell his mother that he is fine, but nothing more. Werther expresses sentiments similar to Edgar's yearnings for complete freedom in an early letter to Wilhelm, in response to his question about whether he ought to send Werther his books. "...ich bitte dich um Gottes Willen, laß sie mir vom Hals. Ich will nicht mehr geleitet... ...sein" (10).

Edgar and Werther's desires for freedom and their resultant actions are indicative of an underlying problem: both young men have absent fathers. Werther's father is not mentioned in the text except to notify the reader that he is dead and has been for some time (74). In contrast, Edgar's father leads us into the text as he interviews his dead son's acquaintances to learn something about Edgar's life. He was, however, also mostly absent from his son's life. The only communication between the two was an occasional postcard to Edgar from his father—the reader is not even informed if Edgar ever wrote back. Additionally, at the inception of the novel we are introduced to Edgar through obituaries from his mother, his schoolmates, and his co-workers in Berlin; yet his father has neglected to contribute one. It is a glaring omission considering his belated interest in Edgar.

The lack of fathers does not, however, indicate a lack of paternalistic presence. Both Edgar and Werther confront patriarchal figures throughout their respective stories. In Werther's case this figure is initially Albert, and later Werther's employers and co-workers and eventually the judicial and clerical authorities in Wahlheim. These are the external forces which cause him to conform to societal norms and exert pressure upon him in a disciplinary way. Werther gives an account where these forces are seen at play during a dinner hosted by Werther's employer, Count C. Even in the introduction of the scene to Wilhelm, the reader is made aware that Werther doesn't want to play by

the generally unspoken rules of society: "Nun war ich bei ihm zu Tische gestern, eben an dem Tage, da abends die noble Gesellschaft von Herren und Frauen bei ihm zusammenkommt, an die ich nie gedacht hab, auch mir nie aufgefallen ist, daß wir Subalternen nicht hineingehören" (69). In this sentence we see that Werther realizes he has imposed upon an evening intended for the nobility, and that he, an employee of the count, does not belong in this particular tableau. Werther further explains: "Ich merkte nicht, daß die Weiber am Ende des Saals sich in die Ohren pisperten, daß es auf die Männer zirkulierte, daß Frau von S... mit dem Grafen redte (das alles hat mir Fräulein B... nachher erzählt)" (70). Even after the count asks him to leave, he does not realize what a stir he has caused. It is only upon hearing a belated account from Miss B that he is forced to the realization that he made a spectacle of himself. His desire to be a free spirit supersedes his ability to fit in with society and follow its rules.

Due to Werther's station in life, society constrains him from socializing freely with those who are in the upper class. Whenever he exerts his individualism and makes decisions which run counter to the societal norms of his day, he encounters the forces of patriarchy, which push him back into line. At the aforementioned dinner party it is the count who chastises Werther. Werther writes that he delayed leaving the party, "...bis endlich der Graf auf mich losging und mich in ein Fenster nahm. ‚Sie wissen‘, sagt' er, ‚unsere wunderbaren Verhältnisse, die Gesellschaft ist unzufrieden, merk ich, Sie hier

zu sehn..." (70) Here, the count is the embodiment of the patriarchal superego—his objection to Werther's presence is the voice of reality, shaking Werther abruptly out of his make-believe world wherein he can do and be whatever he wants. Werther can live in his own version of reality only as long as it does not present a conflict with society's reality. When a conflict does occur, it results in Werther getting the short end of the exchange; after all, unspoken rules have consequences, just as explicit regulations do.

This is an instance of the reality principle intruding upon Werther's desires: society, as represented by the count, is acting out the function of the father and enforcing the superego, disallowing Werther to do as he likes. In Freud's terms, Werther's desires for instant gratification, in this case acknowledgement and acceptance, cannot be fulfilled and he must endure the pains of reality as enforced by the father.

Another example is given to us by our editor, who steps in to explain things after several eventful days. He explains the current tension between Lotte and Albert and how it grows until, "...zuletzt Albert seiner Frau mit ziemlich trockenen Worten sagt: sie möchte, wenigstens um der Leute willen, dem Umgange mit Werthern eine andere Wendung geben und seine allzuöfteren Besuche abschneiden" (94). Here, again, society's conventions and limitations are voiced through a character, and its collective influence exerted upon Werther. Albert's words to Lotte lead her to tell Werther that he is to discontinue his frequent visits. During a visit prior to Christmas she endeavors to

enforce Albert's edict gently, telling him „Sie sollen auch beschert kriegen, wenn Sie recht geschickt sind, ein Wachsstockchen und noch was“ (96). To which, Werther eagerly responds, „wie soll ich sein, wie kann ich sein, beste Lotte?“ (96). Lotte then gives Werther the condition: “Donnerstag abend ist Weihnachtsabend, da kommen die Kinder, mein Vater auch, da kriegt jedes das Seinige, da kommen Sie auch—aber nicht eher” (96). Here Werther has pushed beyond the limits of what was acceptable, attempting to attain a relationship with Lotte that he may never have, and society has pushed back. Even in Werther's final act of defiance against the patriarchal, there is an example of the patriarchal not putting up with it: when Werther commits suicide, the ultimate act of individualism, he is buried between two trees in a back corner of the churchyard near the fields, away from the “frommen Christen” (116). In a description of the ceremony, Lotte and Albert are mentioned, as well as various members of Lotte's family, yet “kein Geistlicher hat ihn begleitet” (118) He is denied that final blessing because of his manner of death.

In the same vein, Edgar, too, encounters patriarchal authority in various places: but in these examples it is manifestly demonstrated that the patriarchal is very different for Edward than it is for Werther. Although patriarchal figures abound they are shadows of the fathers in Goethe's work. Such examples include: Addi and Zarembo, both members of Edgar's workgroup, the teacher whose toe Edgar broke, and Dieter.

Within the workgroup, Edgar's sarcasm and individualism are, to a great extent, tolerated by the other members. Even after a confrontation between Edgar and Addi, caused by Edgar's mockery of Addi's botched attempt at a paint gun, Addi and Zaremba come to his apartment to bring him back to the group. Addi explains to Edgar's father, "Ich könnte sagen, daß wir ihn ziemlich schnell wieder zurückgeholt haben" (110). Consequently, Edgar has experienced virtually no punishment as a result of his individualistic, anti-social behavior. Breaking his teacher's toe had no real consequence for Edgar. Despite the fact that his teacher was an authority figure, who had the power to influence Edgar's future, all it would have taken to brush the incident to the side would have been a public apology. Even after weeks spent in Berlin, he could have returned to his education. Another example mirrors the scene where Werther kisses Lotte against her will: out of anger toward Dieter, Charlie asks Edgar if he wants to kiss her. Edgar seizes the opportunity and kisses Charlie passionately, not releasing her even when she reacts in surprise. Not having expected such a fervent response, Charlie is furious. However, instead of being handed some sort of punishment by Charlie, Dieter, or even society, Edgar is simply left alone. Charlie runs from him at the first opportunity to get away. "Charlie sollte warten. Aber sie stieg aus. Ich konnte sie nicht halten... ..Ich weiß nicht, warum ich ihr nicht nachrannte" (135).

Unlike Werther's experiences with authority and the patriarchal society, Edgar encounters no real resistance to speak of when he pushes against societal conventions. He not only goes unpunished, but his actions seem almost to go entirely unnoticed. Here, the problem is not that the DDR was too conscious of Edgar, but rather, it was not conscious enough. Edgar was a model student until he ran away—he was not a radical, he was not pro-democracy; he did not demonstrate or cause any problems. Then, when he finally decides to exert his individualism, he cannot get anyone to believe that he is really who he aspires to be. He not only fails to awaken notice as a rebel, he is unable to even get the patriarchy to notice that he is alive.

Yet another indication of the failure of the patriarchal in Edgar's life is reflected in his relationship with his mother. His mother is an overwhelmingly powerful figure in his life, to an extent that would not be possible were there not a looming void from the absence of Edgar's father. Edgar's father has been mostly absent from Edgar's life since he was five years old, which results in his relationship with his mother being the dominant one in his life. Edgar's peers recognize the prominence of this connection and behind his back he is called a 'mama's boy' (21). In truth, Edgar admits that he kept himself out of a lot of pranks and other activities with his classmates, because of his relationship with his mother. Speaking of a joke his classmates pulled where the young men all wore mini-skirts to work, he explains, "Rausgehalten hab ich mich einfach, weil

ich Müttern keinen Ärger machen wollte. ...Ich wollte ihr nie Ärger machen“ (22). He thinks that such a way of life can be suffocating, and he missed out on too many opportunities for fun. He admits that this has to do with his flight from home to Berlin. “Ich hatte genug davon, als lebender Beweis dafür rumzulaufen, daß man einen Jungen auch sehr gut ohne Vater erziehen kann.“ (23) Edgar was missing something in his life, and when it wasn't provided for him, he went out to find it.

Another point of interest in the relationship between Edgar and his mother is its overdetermined nature; it is not just a familial relationship. His mother is connected to him as his principal and, accordingly, must take an official and sometimes disciplinary role with Edgar. This means that she fills the void which the patriarchal has left. Edgar has played the model student for so long, however, that the need for discipline has been scant. When that need arises, at the point in time when Edgar injures his teacher and runs away, she fails in the patriarchal aspect of her role and Edgar is allowed to escape and live in Berlin without facing the consequences of his actions. Here, again, Edgar is left to his own devices; the patriarchal society which ought to have reacted to his rebellion is oblivious to his plight, instead.

In addition to problems with individuals who represent the paternal, the absence of Edgar's actual father is a direct representation of the problem with the lack of paternal in the DDR. In an example from Edgar's life, we are privy to an early

conversation between Willi and Edgar's father wherein Willi brings up the topic of Edgar's attitude in regard to his father. In response to this topic, the ghost of Edward comments upon his fantasy of his father as a painter, "Der schwarze Mann von Mittenberg. Der mit seiner Malerei, die kein Mensch verstand, was natürlich allemal an der Malerei lag" (21). This is an interesting account from Edgar, because Edgar does not know his father. This is established on the very first page of the novel, where Edgar's mother lashes out at his father, declaring that he has no right to criticize her. He was "...ein Mann, der sich jahrelang um seinen Sohn nur per Postkarte gekümmert hat!" (9). The lack of involvement in Edgar's life by his father indicates that Edgar's opinions and perceptions of his father are grossly skewed and lack the validity of a first-person account. He does not know his father, he only dreams of him. Without a real, existing father figure, he can only work with an idealization. Because he does not know his father, his conviction that he is a misunderstood artist has less to do with reality than it has to do with Edgar's fantasy and the desire to be able to claim a lineage that fits into his image of himself.

Tellingly, this imaginary exemplar, chosen by Edgar, points to a much deeper problem presented in the book, which is, that the DDR lacked certain models or archetypes. Edgar's fatherless is more than a simple plot point: it is a symbolic void of the engagement of figurative fathers—fathers exist in name only. Concomitant to this is

a lack of access to a DDR role model who can represent the individuality and rebelliousness that Edgar feels. He ends up imitating J.D Salinger in a comically imperfect way. Edgar speaks in a stilted dialect that is more a parody of how a teenager speaks than an actual reflection of youth culture. His very first sentences to the reader cue us that he is going to speak differently, "Stop mal, stop!—Das ist natürlich Humbug!" (10) He wears 'real jeans', which a person above the age of twenty-five cannot understand (27), and he smokes old banana peels in lieu of pot, since he does not know where to get it (31).

Edgar suffers, not from an overabundance of structure which tries to fence him in, but, rather, from a decided lack of structure. Edgar makes ongoing efforts to solidify his individualist persona and be a rebel with a cause, but he fails to incite the interest of the patriarchal figures in the book. Kurt Fickert is, therefore wrong, I believe, when he reads this work as a narrative of resistance to oppression.

Plenzdorf depicts in his novel an identity crisis which comes about because the unique personality is frustrated in its development by the restrictions placed on it through society's espousal of conformity. Edgar's attempt to confine himself as a spontaneously creative individual within the bounds of a limited social structure... ..is, however, doomed to failure by Plenzdorf. (Fickert 72)

Here Fickert argues that Edgar's environment hems him in, but Fickert overlooks the fact that when Edgar acts spontaneously or individually there is little that resists him. His own father makes no attempt to get involved until after Edgar is already dead. When Edgar shows up on his doorstep he not only does not recognize him, but he hesitates to let him in for fear Edgar will disturb his domestic situation by intruding upon his girlfriend. The patriarch does not have time for the rebel. On the metaphorical level, the message is that the DDR is too distant to inspire a popular culture of rebellion.

The contrast could not be stronger between the DDR and the Germany of Goethe's novel. In Werther's world of *Sturm und Drang*, one may claim to be an individualistic genius or a child of nature and receive social recognition; there is a template for such personalities. Think on the moment when Werther and Lotte are alone after the passing of a great storm: Lotte turns to Werther and utters a single word, "Klopstock!" (27) This codeword betrays a precedent and a vocabulary for dealing with individuals of Werther's type. The currency of this type plays into Werther's suicide plans: when staged correctly, his death will not just be seen as pointless madness, but as a gesture of defiance or even martyrdom.

Werther's world permits him such meaningful self-enactment, but Edgar's world did not produce or recognize rebels or individuals, and thus, Edgar was powerless to achieve rebellion or individuality. His life and death are futile as a result—evidenced

clearly by the fact that, despite a second chance at explaining his life and returning to narrate it from the grave, neither Edgar, his father, nor the reader can make any sense out of Edgar's story. His father, in conversation with Addi, admits as much: "Ich habe Edgar seit seinem fünften Lebensjahr nicht gesehen. Ich weiß nichts über ihn, auch jetzt nicht. Charlie, eine Laube, die nicht mehr steht, Bilder, die es nicht mehr gibt, und diese Maschine" (148). No one is the wiser for having heard his story and Edgar anticipates his inevitable disappearance, as he explains that a person ceases to be, even in non-corporeal form, once they are no longer remembered. "Wir alle hier wissen was uns blüht. Daß wir aufhören zu existieren, wenn ihr aufhört, an uns zu denken. Meine Chancen sind da wohl mau. Bin zu jung gewesen" (17). Werther is not so easily forgotten in death, because his death is a performance of the rebellious genius that his society acknowledged; Edgar's death cannot acquire any such mythic significance.

In conclusion, we may observe that Edgar is trying to find himself by rebelling against the familiar, but he is not, as Fickert claims, a youth, "whose individualism a narrow-minded society has tried to destroy..." (70). There is little evidence of society reaching out to correct Edgar. In the DDR, an active communist has nothing to struggle or rebel against. Instead of finding his own personality by confronting what he knows, he is drowning in the anonymous, faceless morass of the DDR. Werther, too, is attempting to establish his identity: he wants to be recognized as a poet, a passionate

lover of nature, and a free spirit. He runs into real resistance, however, and each obstacle he encounters is a direct representation of the patriarchal society in which he lives. His boss, the count, Albert, and the society of Wahlheim are all different masks worn by the patriarchal. This lends Werther's obstacles a mythical quality: the patriarchal is everyone and everywhere. Werther's battle is an epic one: Werther vs. the World. Edgar's difficulties have no such power, however. His attempts at rebellion are one failure after another, and they are all meaningless failures: his schooling, his art, the relationships with Charlie and his father, his work with the painting group and the hydraulic paint gun. None of these add up to anything or have any greater meaning beyond the individual failure—they are all the struggles of a normal young person: Edgar vs. nothing in particular.

This conclusion may be somewhat shocking to the reader, considering the DDR's reputation as a parent state, famous for policing its own citizens. It has been reported that there were perhaps as many as 500,000 informants (inoffizielle Mitarbeiter or IM) over the four decades of DDR history: a ratio of one informant for every 6.5 citizens (Koehler 8-9). With such figures to consider, it is startling, indeed, to find that an author could present a character who struggles with a lack of recognition. Yet, this is the very problem that Edgar struggles with. There are no IMs in his story, no Stasi members and no uniform-clad characters to force Edgar to go home. We have only Edgar, alone in a

Gartenlaube, looking for someone who cares, for in the end Edgar is simply too ordinary to awake anyone's suspicion that he could ever be a threat to the state. Even after fleeing to Berlin, he is more interested in buying 'real jeans', planting a garden, and seeking out new music acts than he is in participating in anything which would mark him as an enemy of socialism.

Chapter 2: In the Wake of the Fall: Fathers in *Vater, Mutter, Mörderkind*

A cursory reading of Plenzdorf's 1993 screenplay, *Vater, Mutter, Mörderkind*—filmed for TV a year prior by Heiner Carow—immediately invites comparison with *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* Both take place in East Germany and both feature young men experiencing a coming-of-age who are trying to discover their adult identities.

Additionally, both works were conceptualized and published as books only after they had first been introduced to the public as a drama or a film. Upon closer inspection, however, it is easy to see that the two stories contain divergent themes. Edgar leaves his home to travel to Berlin and begin the life of an artist—he no longer wishes to conform to society in the DDR and models his behavior and attitude to that of a Western rebel. Karl, on the other hand, is perfectly content to live his life as a socialist: he evidences no desire for limitless freedom or the trappings of capitalism. Additional differences exist in the family situations of the two boys; Edgar lives in a veritable void of the patriarchal, while Karl has had an adoptive father for roughly three quarters of his life. Despite these differences, the void of the patriarchal is just as central to the deeper import of the work as Edgar's; both families have significance which surpass the meaning of the individual's story. In this chapter I will establish the relationship between Karl and his adoptive father, Julius, as a metaphor for the DDR. The three important moments of this metaphorical reader will be handles as follows: First, I will address the lack of a natural familial context in the work. Second, I will examine Julius' arrest and subsequent

absence from the family as it applies to the metaphor. Third, I will deal with the relationship between Karl and the prison guard Überlaut, and the ramifications of that relationship on the metaphor of the DDR. Prior to my analysis, however, let me review the plot in more detail.

In the opening scenes of *Mörderkind*, the reader is plunged into the very middle of German reunification: a line of East Germans stand in front of the bank, awaiting their turn at the window in weather that mirrors the tension of the political climate. “Die Temperatur ist unangemessen hoch, die Sonne grell. Für niemanden in der Schlange ist Schatten da” (5). Various news bites are shared and the reader learns that among various changes occurring, the West is offering a reward for information leading to the capture of domestic terrorists. As events unfold we witness the arrest of one such a terrorist, Julius, and the ensuing surprise of his wife and son, who were unaware of his earlier affiliations with the Red Army Faction (RAF). Furthermore, we learn that his son, Karl, is not his biological offspring, but the son of a Nazi soldier who was presumably killed in action during the war. Julius has been Karl’s adoptive father since he was three, however, staying with him and his mother for the past ten years and working at the refinery in Schwedt.

The revelation of Julius as a former terrorist is not well received by Karl’s peers at school. The day following Julius’ arrest and incarceration, Karl’s classmate refuses to

take his usual seat next to him, telling the teacher, "Ich hab keine Lust, neben einem Mörderkind zu sitzen" (17). Thus, Karl is branded with the same label as Julius and despite opportunities to divorce himself from the association, Karl accepts the designation, refusing to flee the confrontation after both his mother and teachers encourage him to absent himself from school. Instead, Karl embraces his adoptive father's past and visits Julius in prison, when even his mother cannot bring herself to do so. There he meets Judiciary Staff Sergeant Überlaut, who is currently working for the facility where Julius is immured. A relationship forms between the two based upon Überlaut's Nazi past and his service in Schwedt, Karl's hometown.

Karl also forms a friendship with another young man whom he meets at an old bunker, a recent remnant of the former East German government. The two boys spend their time playing with leftover munitions in the bunker, acting out battle scenarios and practicing their shooting, all the while concealing their activities under a cloak of secrecy. This play-acting eventually leads to Karl hatching a plot to free the imprisoned Julius and escape together with him to Cuba where he dreams they can safely return to something like their former life. Ultimately, his plan goes awry and he is unable to free Julius. The book closes with Karl fighting tears in the back seat of a getaway car while his father remains imprisoned.

From this brief summary of the plot, it should be clear that *Mörderkind* shares some thematic similarities with *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* It is readily apparent, however, that the protagonists are experiencing East Germany in two very different ways. Unlike the narrative of Edgar's stay in Berlin, Karl's world in *Mörderkind* is saturated with specters of violence: he has an abandoned military area for a playground, a Nazi father whom he has never known because he was supposedly killed during the war, and a terrorist for an adoptive father. He also harbors dreams of freeing his adoptive father from prison with the use of force. When his plan begins to fall apart he calmly steals a gun from Überlaut's holster and turns it on himself in lieu of taking a hostage. "Überlaut sieht sich um. Aber Karl hat die Waffe nicht auf ihn gerichtet, sondern auf sich selbst. Der Lauf drückt ihm unterhalb des Kinns in den Hals" (80). At every turn, then, we find violence in this work.

With such prevalent mention of force within the book's pages, it can be no surprise that the academic discussion of *Mörderkind* exclusively addresses violence. The violence associated with the Rote Armee Faktion (RAF) and its terrorist activities is more intriguing as a result. Plenzdorf's Eastern perspective on the topic of the RAF is especially of interest, considering that it is something of an aberration: the majority of the existing narratives about the RAF are predominantly from a Western perspective. Gabriele Mueller mentions that while East German scholars have raised their voice

often on the issue of politically motivated violence, the RAF is not an East German, but rather a West German topic. She explains that

The scarcity of East German contributions to the remembering of German terrorism is not surprising. The activities of the RAF in the seventies and the response of the West German state did not feature prominently in the East German media. Many East Germans did not follow all the events or, if they did, only from a distance and never with the same level of emotional involvement. (Mueller 270)

Added to their physical and emotional distance from the happenings of 1977, was a distaste for capitalism which led East Germans to sympathize with and romanticize the RAF. These factors combined to lead many artists to take extreme liberties with the actual history, and present, instead, their version of events. Deupmann points to that fact, indicating that much of Eastern RAF literature served as a way of restructuring memories, changing them to suit the artist's vision.

...Beispiele machen indes deutlich, dass die 'Geschichten', die in Literatur, Theater und Film der Gegenwart vom Linksterrorismus der siebziger Jahre erzählt werden, keineswegs mit der 'Geschichtsschreibung' in Konkurrenz treten wollen. Vielmehr geht es um die ästhetische Auseinandersetzung mit einer im ‚Deutschen Herbst‘ 1977

kulminierenden Geschichte, die längst auf dem Wege umfassender Medialisierung und Myth(olog)isierungen ins kollektive Gedächtnis der Deutschen eingetragen wurde. (Deupmann 81)

Thus, for the East, the literature is a representation of Eastern reality: a reality seen through the lens of the East and socialism. For those in the East who bothered to think about it at all, the RAF was an organization which strove to defeat 'the other' so often used in socialist propaganda: the fascists on the other side of the wall.

The tendency among East Germans to embellish and mythologize the history of the RAF, making it an item of nostalgia, is corroborated by Cornils, Mueller and Henze². However, Henze does point out that Plenzdorf's work is an exception to this. Julius, the lone RAF representative in *Mörderkind* is not a heroic figure; instead, he is described as "...über vierzig, penibel, und sehr durchschnittlich angezogen, um nicht zu sagen

² 'Diese Einordnung erscheint zweifelhaft, da die nostalgisch-romantische Verklärung des Terrorismus durch den jugendlichen Protagonisten in Plenzdorfs Szenarium mit der Darstellung der Figur des ehemaligen RAF-Terroristen Julius konterkariert wird.' (Henze 189)

'Consistent with the majority of films by East German directors made in the first half of the 1990s, *Vater, Mutter, Mörderkind* draws a deeply pessimistic picture of the future of unified Germany. However, unlike others, it does not offer a nostalgic look back as an alternative...' (Mueller 277)

'The literature that has reflected, romanticized and glorified the German Student Movement has undoubtedly played a part in keeping the experience (if not the ideas) of the revolt alive...' (Cornils 295)

langweilig. Sein Haarschnitt korrekt. Schuhe vom Konsum. Brille von der Kasse“ (7).

Julius may not be exactly boring, but he certainly does not seem radical enough to have a history with a terrorist organization. This differentiates *Mörderkind* from other representations of the RAF in German literature and film, eastern or western.

Because Plenzdorf's character is at such odds with the dominant literary representation of the RAF, it begs the question, why? To what purpose is Julius normalized and his violent history minimized? From the moment that we learn of his crimes, Julius downplays his involvement: "...ich habe niemand ermordet. Geschossen und einen hats getroffen. Und wir haben nie was für uns gewollt,, (15). Julius, an "unnatural" outsider stained by a violent past, refuses to take responsibility for the violence he exercised. Later, Julius explains his actions to Karl during their first meeting after his arrest and the guard, Überlaut, nods in accord as Julius downplays the violence of the shooting for which he has been immured. Afterward, even Schuster, Julius' defense attorney substantiates the diminishment of his actions as he verbally commutes Julius' sentence: "Dann trifft es einen, und wenn es ihn tödlich trifft oder er an den Folgen stirbt, dann ist das Totschlag. Kein Mord,, (35). The complicity of these other voices in Julius' self-deception fails to change the fact that he is still behind bars. However, Julius' posturing allows him to construct his own version of reality: one where he can live with himself and where his ideals are valid.

Wittstock addresses similar violence within the RAF, as well as the posturing and whitewashing of their terrorist activities. An Eastern belief in utopias and the willingness to fight for a cause, even violently, was applauded, while the effects of the violence were downplayed.

Rasch und fast rückstandslos reduziert sich das politische Thema Terror... ..auf seine ästhetischen oder psychologischen Aspekte. Ihre Erzähler sind auf die Authentizität von Erfahrung oder auf das Überlegenheitsgefühl eines Helden aus, wenn sie zu ihren durchaus beschränkten Gewalt-Aktionen starten. (Wittstock 74)

Here, we see authors and playwrights taking a figure of violence, demonized by the West, and changing the subject from the act of terrorism to the question of personal feelings and convictions. Thus, Plenzdorf's Julius is focused, not on the damage he has (perhaps unwittingly) caused, but on his beliefs and purpose, a move which normalizes him. So, although Julius' identity as a terrorist is a vital component to the screenplay, it is superseded by a focus on the beliefs and utopianism of the East; Julius' function as an adoptive father to Karl overshadows his role as a terrorist

Julius' violent past and the role of violence within the work open up the metaphorical dimension of the text. In this metaphor, Julius stands in for the East German state, while Karl and Uschi stand in for the citizens. While states are often

represented as patriarchal figures, Julius' portrayal of the state is particularly apt because of his artificiality as a patriarch. It is very clear that Julius is not Karl's natural father—ten years spent with Karl and Uschi cannot resolve that particular difficulty. Translating this into terms of the DDR, this means that the DDR was also an unnatural political body. It totally contradicts the classic Burkean organic-conservative conception of a state as an outgrowth of indigenous cultural and political traditions, and the duration of its existence could not make it any more legitimate. Accordingly, Julius' stay with Uschi and Karl is not 'natural'. Uschi comments upon this the evening of Julius' arrest in speaking with Karl: "Ich hab nicht verstanden, was Julius... was er an mir gefunden hat, einer wie der"(16). He has no blood ties to the family, nor does he have romantic ties, as Uschi observes; in this way he is an 'artificial' patriarch.

Karl's 'natural' father died when he was very young. We learn that not only did Karl not grow up with his natural father, but that his father never even saw him. Uschi is looking at old pictures and comes across one of "...Karls leiblichem Vater—ein blasser junger Mann in der Uniform der Handelsmarine der DDR." Karl asks, "Hat der mich eigentlich gesehen? Irgendwann?" (23), whereupon Uschi replies in the negative. Despite Julius and Karl's mutual affection, Karl acknowledges that Julius is not his actual father, addressing him by his first name at all times, never according him the

titles due to a father. At a metaphorical level, this is a blatant sign that the child, here the citizens of the DDR, recognize the unnaturalness of the father, or the state.

Reading Julius as a metaphor of the political state, we can understand how important it is that Julius cannot put down roots: prior to beginning a life with Karl and Uschi, he was a terrorist in West Germany. This foundation of violence is never washed away—his reaction to the news broadcasts of (former) terrorists being taken into police custody is panic. At one point he entertains thoughts of fleeing again, just as he escaped into East Germany. “Er... ...fährt durch die Polderwiesen, erreicht den Oderdeich. Grenzposten mit dem Staatswappen, jenseits liegt Polen,, (12). In a like manner, the DDR’s foundation of violence never can be done away with: the blood spilt during the founding of East Germany could not be washed away. As a result of his history, Julius is on the run ten years after the incident which caused him to initially make his escape to the East. The disorder and tumult of his past mean that he’d never be able to have a ‘natural’ family with anyone—he would always be looking over his shoulder. His roots in violence are so deep, that it can never cleanse itself from the blood it spilt: a foundation in violence is an illegitimate one. A demonstration of Julius’ violent roots is evidenced in a flashback to his first meeting with Karl and Uschi: “Karl war im Besitz einer Wasserpistole gewesen, mit der er auf Passanten spritzte. Das gab Ärger, aber Uschi hatte keine Gewalt über ihn,, (42). Julius proceeds to teach Karl how to better

amuse himself and terrorize fellow travelers with the weapon by shooting into the air so that the water will strike from above. This violence, the root of the illegitimacy of Julius' pseudo-family, is recognized by those around the family upon Julius' arrest: many of Karl's classmates shun him and Uschi loses her job. Just as Karl and Uschi are subject to the attitudes of their neighbors who refuse to recognize their unnatural family, the DDR struggled to gain legitimacy among its European neighbors.

The metaphorical reading of Julius and his family becomes most productive once he is arrested and taken to prison in the West. This forces Karl and Uschi to make decisions about their identity, where they belong, and how they intend to go forward. This was the same decision faced by millions of former East Germans: who am I now that East Germany no longer exists; do I stay here and what happens now? For most of Karl's life, he thought that he had a family; then when Julius is taken away, his world-view is challenged. Had he ever had a father? Would he still accept Julius as a father-figure? He is forced to determine whether or not he will cling to his pseudo-natural relationship with Julius. Uschi is confronted with this decision as well. She asks, "Wer sind wir jetzt eigentlich? Wir brauchen einen neuen Namen. Ist man überhaupt verheiratet, wenn der Mann einen falschen Namen hat?" (23). She ultimately decides to sever her relationship with Julius—conveying this to him by sending an envelope with family pictures, including a wedding picture which she has cut to bits. She makes the

decision to leave Schwedt and return to her hometown: to her mother and father. Later, when speaking to Karl, she fantasizes of a world wherein the family is still intact. “Ich glaub, ich wär so verrückt gewesen und hätte alles mitgemacht, wenn er mir bloß gesagt hätte, was mit ihm ist. Ich hätte zum Beispiel nicht gewartet, bis die Bullen vor der Tür stehen. Da wärn wir nämlich längst in Kuba am weißen Strand“ (69). All of these reactions are reactive—whether she holds on to the inorganic family or not, she can only turn or run away. Many East Germans made a similar decision and simply fled: either to the West or, for those who wished to live on in socialism, further East.

Karl’s attitude is dramatically different: instead of reacting with passivity, he immediately and proactively adopts an attitude of violence. In the very moment in which Julius is carted away by the police, he turns around for a last look at his family and sees Karl standing there, his left hand raised in a fist: the sign of solidarity displayed by 5,000 Germans at the death of RAF member Holger Meins, as reported by Nyary. He desires to free Julius with the use of violence: via his acquaintance with the young man from Karvendorf he plans to acquire an F6 and grenades to use in carrying out his plans. In all of his planning, however, he never indicates that he believes his family will ever be the same again. His dream, inspired by his mother’s, is to run away to Cuba. There is no illusion that he can restore what has been lost, and yet he cannot move forward to embrace the West. The metaphorical meaning here is clear: denizens

of the DDR were forcefully pulled into the West—the unification of Germany was not amalgamated. This was not a blending together of two cultures and people. In business terms it was less of a merger and more of a takeover. A return to the DDR as it had been was impossible; East Germans had a decision to make: embrace the West wholeheartedly or cling to the familiar. There was no option to return to socialism as it was, though: the wall had already been torn down and the socialist party lost in the general elections. For those who had voted for them, or for others who had little desire to be integrated into West Germany, the culture and the history of East Germany could be sustained. It was an attractive option to many because, even if the socialist state failed, it was a known and it was a place where those individuals had a place and a function.

With this context in mind, Karl's rebellion is not carried out with the intent to return things to the way they were; in the midst of the terrible hopelessness of the situation he simply wants to be recognized. Even after having accepted the inevitable, Karl (standing in for the DDR populace) felt violated by the manner in which his family was torn apart (i.e. in which the state was simply eliminated in the process of German reunification). By freeing Julius he gains the recognition of the alien state as a non-integrating body; additionally, by fleeing to Cuba, he escapes to a like-minded world where he would be legitimized. Karl decides to pursue both routes to receiving

recognition because, despite the ‘unnaturalness’ of his family (the DDR), it is a family he knows. In like manner, citizens of the DDR had to make a decision to hold on to what they know or embrace the West. Once the wall fell, there was no putting it back up or returning to the past—this was generally acknowledged, and yet the manner in which the state ended and the manner in which East Germany was incorporated into the West was a source of resentment for many East Germans. Karl cannot go back, but neither does he wish to embrace the West, which he associates with beggars and the forceful removal of Julius from his family (37). In the sense of the metaphor—the people of the DDR were torn between letting go of what was and learning to accept the new world of West Germany.

Why would Karl and, thereby, former East Germans, eschew integration into the West? The answer to this lies in the strangeness of the West; that strangeness is well-represented in the book by the fact that there is no one to represent it. Julius, Karl, Uschi, and even Überlaut are all obvious representations of the state, the people, and former regimes. These individuals all fit into the metaphor of the family as I have described it and their actions and thoughts are accurate representations of the things and people they embody. In stark contrast, there is no one to personify the West—there are very few characters that are even an option. Schuster, Julius’ lawyer, and Dr. Brenner are two of the only West German figures we meet. Aside from the fact that neither character

receives much 'face time', Schuster is fighting on Julius' behalf, which makes him a poor candidate. Additionally, there is no one character that clearly identifies with capitalism, which is the West's defining characteristic. Lacking a character to assume the role of the West makes it easier to understand Karl's confusion toward the West. Despite the fact that his family dynamic is artificial and skewed, it nevertheless mimics a natural family—something the West cannot offer, something which the West doesn't even pretend to offer.

The lack of a family in the West and the disappearance of Karl's Eastern family, unnatural as it is, leaves him as rootless as any war orphan. Unlike Edgar in *Die neuen Leiden*, Karl is still confronted with authoritative figures in his fatherlessness, and yet he shares Edgar's difficulty of feeling recognized and validated. Karl's world is shifting under his feet like so much quicksand—he has gone from being a part of a system where he knew his place and had importance to being relegated to an outcast. The scope of change that has occurred for him in such a short time is reflected in an exchange with the youth whom Karl met at the abandoned bunker.

Karl: Ich wollte Lehrer werden.

Der Junge: Und jetzt?

Karl: Jetzt Lehrer????!

Der Junge: Ich Treckerfahrer. Aber vergiß es.

...

Karl: Alles nicht so einfach. (28)

Here, Karl recognizes, that not only is Julius gone, but that his plans and dreams for the future are gone; his entire way of life is gone. The disappearance of the DDR is a particular blow for Karl: he has grown up with it, in that same way that he grew up with Julius. The DDR was always there and its sudden absence forces him to confront the void its absence will leave. He cannot bring himself to embrace the West, attempts to rebel and flee to a place where his way of life is legitimized, and ultimately fails. At the very end of the work we see him struggling with the realization that, while he need not accept the West, the East is truly gone and identifying with the East will never gain him the recognition he seeks.

This loss and the sense of displacement he feels lead him to grasp at straws. He is desperate to rediscover who he is and how he can reorient himself. This desperation leads to a disturbing relationship with another character who has undergone a similar transition after World War II: Überlaut, the old Nazi who guards Julius at the correctional facility. Karl builds a relationship with Überlaut very quickly: in their very first encounter, Überlaut reveals that he is familiar with Karl's hometown and the

surrounding area, having served there with Otto Skorzeny, a famous Nazi military leader. Intrigued by both the familiarity with Karl's hometown and his blatant history of violence, Karl's interest is piqued and he urges Überlaut to share his wartime exploits. Überlaut does so with gusto, betraying that despite his position as a staff sergeant at the western jail, he is not a liberal capitalist at heart. Überlaut transforms into a father figure when we learn that he was not only stationed in Karl's hometown of Schwedt, but he had a girlfriend names Ursel. Karl responds to this revelation with, "Uschi. Wie meine Mutter" (58). Überlaut denies the possibility of being Karl's father, yet the connection has already been established: even if he is not Karl's biological father, he is a perfect stand in for Karl's Nazi father, lost to the war. This fact, played out on the metaphor of the DDR and the family implies a parallel between the DDR and Nazi Germany. Both were 'unnatural' political systems, or patriarchies, grounded in blood and terror—unnatural because of implementation and sustenance by force, sharing the connection of violence. Additionally, as the Nazi regime experienced its death throes, the DDR was in the process of birth: it was the phoenix which rose from the bloody ashes of Nazi history. Karl identifies particularly with the old Nazi because Überlaut is the remnant of a state which is the predecessor of the state that Karl grew up with. Karl looks to Überlaut as a representation of another patriarchy; if he cannot have his father, then he will seek another father out. Never mind that this father fell long ago and is no more viable than the socialist state in which Karl was raised.

The connection between these two inorganic systems lead us to the parallel of their downfalls: both were built unnaturally, and neither could sustain itself. At the end of the novel, we see Karl coming to a realization that he is powerless and his family can never be together again in any form. Karl's defeat is well represented by the red scarf he has worn since the very beginning of the novel (17). Karl's almost casual disregard of the accessory reveals to the reader the impact of Karl's failure to impose his will upon the situation in which he finds himself. Karl is letting go of all that he has known—the East German/communist way of life cannot be maintained, and Karl can do nothing to prolong its existence. While he already knows that things would not go back to being the way they were, he never entertained the thought of being truly fatherless. His distress is reflected in his actions: "Julius umarmt Karl. Überlaut setzt sich an den Tisch und nimmt sein Skatenspiel aus der Tasche. Julius und Karl sind immer noch umarmt" (81). Only after being warned that someone was coming did the two break apart and Karl runs from the room at his earliest opportunity. There was no recognition for the DDR or socialism after the fall of the wall—the West came and brought its way of life and its values without bothering to ask East Germans if there was anything they'd like to keep.

Conclusion

The endings of both *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* and *Vater, Mutter, Mörderkind*, point to a kind of depressed resignation and acceptance of the part of Plenzdorf about the absence of the patriarchal within the DDR. Both novels end with heroes who have had victories snatched from before their eyes. Edgar's accidental death and failure with his paint machine and Karl's failed attempt at freeing Julius never gains any significance. There is an inability to make sense of these events and a lingering question: Where do I go from here? Plenzdorf's cryptic endings offer no answers as to where the future was going to take East Germans, just a resounding cry that socialism is gone, and it never really was what we expected it to be, anyway. It never did live up to its promises; it was always more a shadow of a father, than the father, itself.

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